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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

HEINRICH VON KLEIST'S  
"PRINZ FRIEDRICH VON HOMBURG"

by

ELAINE DOROTHY HUGHES

A THESIS

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Heinrich von Kleist's 'Prinz Friedrich von Homburg'" submitted by Elaine Dorothy Hughes in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

of

HEINRICH VON KLEIST'S "PRINZ FRIEDRICH VON HOMBURG"

Chapter one of this thesis considers the state of research on Prinz Friedrich von Homburg. The aims of this chapter are twofold : first, to present an analytical account of the kind of work that has been done on the play, and what it has and has not achieved; second, to provide a background which will make clear the relation of my own interpretative analysis (in chapter two) to previous work. After a brief statement of the presently held views of the date and text of the play, the emphasis in the rest of the first chapter is thus on interpretations, including those derived from source research.

Two broad categories of interpretation are distinguished: those that accept the Elector as the central figure of the play, and those which are more concerned with values exemplified in the character of Prince Friedrich. The few interpretations which are not concerned to make this choice are then considered. It is argued that they are right not to do so, and the interpretative second chapter proceeds on this important assumption.

The theme of responsibility in the play is then explored through an analysis of the conflict between the







military relationships of the characters and their personal relationships. It is shown that when even the minor characters are included in such an investigation, Kleist's play appears far more subtle in its treatment of the problem of responsibility than it has seemed to be to the vast majority of the critics who have made the simplifying choice mentioned above.



I wish to thank my colleagues and friends who encouraged me to persevere with this thesis. My gratitude is due especially to my supervisor, Dr. J. M. Ellis, for our many discussions of Prinz Friedrich von Homburg and his invaluable criticism and encouragement. I wish further to acknowledge my debt to Dr. Ellis for his having discussed with me his own forthcoming work on the play, and having made available to me his as yet unpublished material.



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## CHAPTER ONE

### THE STATE OF RESEARCH ON PRINZ FRIEDRICH VON HOMBURG

The first chapter of this thesis analyzes and categorizes the secondary literature on Prinz Friedrich von Homburg.<sup>1</sup> Since the main aim of the second chapter is interpretative, this survey places most weight on this aspect of literature, and other aspects are dealt with more briefly. That aspect of source research which consists in a search for interpretative hypotheses, as opposed to the mere hunting for a source, is similarly given prominence.

#### 1a. The Dating of the Play

Kleist wrote little about his works so that the few references he did make have become very important.<sup>2</sup> From

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<sup>1</sup>All quotations of the text Prinz Friedrich von Homburg are from: Heinrich von Kleist, Prinz Friedrich von Homburg, ed. Richard Samuel (Berlin, 1964). References to Kleist's letters are taken from: Heinrich von Kleist, Sämtliche Werke und Briefe, ed. Helmut Sembdner, 2nd ed; (Munich, 1961), II.

<sup>2</sup>Heinrich von Kleist, The Prince of Homburg, trans. C.





his correspondence we know that Prinz Friedrich von Homburg was completed in the years 1810-1811. In a letter to his half-sister Ulrike on March 19, 1810, Kleist mentioned a play, taken from Brandenburg history, which he hoped to present to the queen.<sup>1</sup> On June 21, 1811, Kleist told his publisher Georg Andreas Reimer that he was beginning to copy out Prinz Friedrich von Homburg, which he called "ein vaterländisches [Spiel] (mit mancherlei Beziehungen)".<sup>2</sup> He referred to the play as being almost finished in a letter to Fouqué dated August 15, 1811.<sup>3</sup> From his investigations of Kleist's activities between 1808 and 1811, R. Samuel concludes:

So weisen alle Indizien darauf hin, daß Prinz von Homburg zum größten Teil in Prag im Spätsommer und Herbst 1809 und in Berlin im Februar und der ersten Märzhälfte 1810 verfaßt, erst Ende Mai 1811 wieder vorgenommen und dann rasch vollendet oder durchgefeilt wurde.<sup>4</sup>

His assumptions are based, however, on the letters mentioned above and an excerpt from the still-born periodical Germania (1809), which seems to suggest the first scene of Prinz Friedrich von Homburg. Samuel's construction has certainly

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E. Passage (New York, 1956), p. viii: "The basic documents for Kleist scholarship are limited to belated recollections by friends and some two hundred letters of the author." From the latter only two references to the Prince of Homburg may be extracted.

<sup>1</sup>Sembdner, p. 833.

<sup>2</sup>Sembdner, p. 871.

<sup>3</sup>Sembdner, p. 875.

<sup>4</sup>Samuel, 1964 ed., p. 26.



a reasonable degree of probability; we can state with certainty, however, only that the play was written in the years 1809-1811.

### 1b. Editions and Text

Prinz Friedrich von Homburg was first published with all Kleist's "hinterlassene Schriften" by Tieck in 1821. This version differs in punctuation and spelling from the only extant manuscript of the play.<sup>1</sup> Subsequent "Complete Works," such as those edited by Muncker, Zolling, Herzog, Schmidt, Siegen, Genée, Stapf and Sembdner contain features pertaining to Tieck's version, others pertain to manuscript "D", and still others cannot be found in either source. Single editions of Prinz Friedrich von Homburg, such as those by Nollen, Reichelt and Samuel<sup>2</sup> also contain purely editorial emendations. The only edition of the play purporting to be an exact duplicate of "D" and retaining also the original

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<sup>1</sup>Hereafter referred to as the "D" or "Heidelberg" manuscript following the practice of R. Samuel. Tieck's "Erst-druck" differs from this manuscript in substance as well, but mostly in punctuation and grammar. The "D" manuscript has "Hackelbüsche" for line 255, as an example. Tieck has "Fackelbüsche". The Prince says, "Kommt, gebt mir euren Arm!-" in "D". In Tieck's manuscript the Electress says it. (1. 712)

<sup>2</sup>Heinrich von Kleist, Prinz Friedrich von Homburg; ed. Richard Samuel, revised ed. (London, 1962). Hereafter this book will be referred to as "1962 ed." to distinguish it from the "1964 ed." which is based on the "D" manuscript and the primary source for this thesis. See above, p. 1.





punctuation and spelling of this manuscript is Samuel's recent single edition (1964). As it is preferable to have as unemended and accurate a text as possible for critical study, this book will be used as a primary source for this thesis.<sup>1</sup> This does not mean that I am necessarily in agreement with Sembdner's hypothesis,<sup>2</sup> (supported in the introduction of Samuel's 1964 edition), which is that "D" was copied from Kleist's original manuscript, (now lost) and was then the basis of Tieck's Erstdruck. "D" would then be uniquely authoritative. Ellis has argued that this hypothesis is not proven, and that the original manuscript may have been the direct source of both.<sup>3</sup> Whatever side is taken in this controversy, it seems clear that "D" is a better text; a professional copyist's copy of the original is certainly to be preferred to that of Tieck, himself a notorious emendator.

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<sup>1</sup>See above, p. 1 and p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>Set forth in two articles: "Zu Heinrich und Marie von Kleist" and "Fouqués unbekanntes Wirken für Heinrich von Kleist," Jahrbuch der deutschen Schiller-Gesellschaft, Jg. I (1957), s. 157-178 and Jg. II (1958), s. 83-113.

<sup>3</sup>See J. M. Ellis' review of Samuel's 1964 edition, "Heinrich von Kleist: Prinz Friedrich von Homburg," Seminar II (1966), and article, "The Heidelberg Manuscript of Kleist's Prinz Friedrich von Homburg" to be published in Euphorion.



## 2. Source Research

There has been much speculation concerning the possible sources of Prinz Friedrich von Homburg; partly because of the assumption that an understanding of how the play was composed will shed some light on its meaning, critics have sought models for the dramatic situations and characters in the play in past history. The memoirs of Frederick the Great or of Freiherr von Pöllnitz have been quoted by Meyer-Benfey, Gilow, Stahl, Schmidt, Blankenagel and Gundolf as possible sources for the actual historical event, but Mein Vaterland unter den Hohenzollern Regenten, (1803-1805), by K. H. Krause is to be preferred, since it has been established that Kleist did read it.<sup>1</sup> Although the external plot of Prinz Friedrich resembles the historical Battle of Fehrbellin in 1675, there is little similarity between Kleist's characters and the actual people who fought in the battle. The historical Friedrich, for example, was quite unlike the Prince of Kleist's play. He was 42 at the time of the battle, twice married and known as the "Landgraf mit dem silbernen Bein."

Models have been found also in Kleist's contemporary Prussia as well as in ancient history for the personalities and the conflicts of the characters in Prinz

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<sup>1</sup> P. Hoffmann at the beginning of this century found a list of six books which Kleist borrowed from a library in Dresden. Among them were Krause's history and Frederick II, Oeuvres Posthumes, which does not contain his memoirs or include the plot of the play. Cf. Samuel, 1962 ed; p.27.







Friedrich von Homburg. J. Niejahr first pointed to a source in Livy's Ab Urbe Condita, Book VIII, Chapters 30-35, which Passage quotes in his English edition of the play.<sup>1</sup> Quintus Fabius, like Prince Friedrich, was an impetuous youth and was guilty of insubordination in the Samnite War of 325 B.C. Samuel points out, however, that there are three stories of insubordination in Livy. Insubordination and rebellion were the order of the day after 1806.<sup>2</sup> Prince Louis Ferdinand, who disobeyed orders and was killed in a decisive engagement (1806-1807), which was witnessed by Kleist's friend Rühle von Lilienstein, is the contemporary personality most like Prince Friedrich in the play.

Fürstenheim asserts that there are two main sources, that involving the historical Friedrich von Hessen-Homburg, and the "Kronprinzenaffäre" of 1731, the conflict between King Frederick William I of Prussia and his son, the future Frederick the Great. He then shows, in an interesting passage, how the two sources are both present:

When the prince repeatedly addresses the elector as "father" it is clear that this is no mere form of speech: in the poet's mind the two are really father and son. This explains the ambivalent feelings existing between them- the mysterious bond of sympathy and understanding disturbed by sudden outbreaks of hostility on either side (generally in the form of heavy sarcasm)- as well as their strange similarity; it has rightly been said that the two represent the

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<sup>1</sup>J. Niejahr, "Ein Livianisches Motiv in Kleist's Prinz Friedrich von Homburg," Euphorion, IV (1897), 61-66. Passage pp. xiv-xvii.

<sup>2</sup>Samuel, p. 29.



same personality at different stages of his development.<sup>1</sup> Another point is the otherwise inexplicable behaviour of the army. We are expected to believe that a loyal and well-disciplined corps of officers openly defies its supreme commander for the sake of a young general who is arrogant in his behaviour, has already lost two skirmishes and is undoubtedly guilty judged by military standards! Whilst it seems highly improbable that the army should in this way spring to the defence of a mere distant relative of the elector's (who owes his command apparently to this relationship- else there would be no need for a Kottwitz), the case is completely altered if the man concerned is the monarch's own son and heir.<sup>2</sup>

Those who have uncovered historical references to Prinz Friedrich von Homburg generally assume that the play is, as Kleist said, a "vaterländisches [Spiel] (mit mancherlei Beziehungen)", and was thus written to regain the favour of King Frederick II, who had called for nationalistic plays. Die Hermannsschlacht has been interpreted as a patriotic appeal to Austria to continue the struggle against the French. Similarly, the Prussian elements in Prinz Friedrich von Homburg have led to interpretations which bring in Kleist's political views and his relationship to contemporary society. According to Kamnitzer, the play reflects the historical happenings of Kleist's time, which are, in effect, the real source:

Mit oder ohne Absicht spricht Kleist mit seinem Drama für die Auflehnung der Reformpartei und gegen das preußisch-französische Bündnis. Er bringt die

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<sup>1</sup>F. Gundolf, Heinrich von Kleist (Berlin, 1922), p. 146.

<sup>2</sup>E. G. Fürstenheim, "The Sources of Kleist's Prinz Friedrich von Homburg", German Life and Letters, N.S., VIII (1954-1955), 107-108.





Rebellen von 1675 auf die Bühne, rechtfertigt damit die Opposition von 1806 bis 1813 und ruft zum Bruch des Bündnisses mit Frankreich auf, wenn er den Prinzen von Homburg zum Bruch des Bündnisses mit Schweden auffordern läßt.<sup>1</sup>

Tymms calls the play "an optimistic vision of the eventual triumph of the Hohenzollern's military state, to be brought about by the virtues of the traditional Prussian cult of obedience and duty."<sup>2</sup> Benno von Wiese sums up the play in the following often quoted paragraph:

Wenn die Hermannsschlacht das Drama des unbedingten Handelns und des völkischen Aufbruchs ist, so ist der Prinz Friedrich von Homburg eine brandenburgisch-preußische Staatsdichtung, das schönste Denkmal der Verbindung von dichterischer Freiheit und staatlicher Bindung. Durch Kleists Leben geht die Auseinandersetzung mit dem preußischen Staat. Der preußische Adlige und Offizier geriet zunächst in einen schweren Konflikt mit der unpersönlichen, versachlichten und bürokratischen Ordnungsmaschine des absolutistischen Beamtenstaates.<sup>3</sup>

S. Burckhardt is also of the opinion that Kleist's relation to contemporary society is the source of Prinz Friedrich von Homburg, but thinks it works in the opposite direction to that seen by Tymms. Kleist, the artist, was in conflict with his diametric opposite, the Prussian state which extolled order above all, and it is this conflict which he feels is

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<sup>1</sup>H. Kamnitzer, "Geschichte und Gestaltung", Neue deutsche Literatur, V (1957), 131.

<sup>2</sup>R. Tymms, German Romantic Literature (London, 1955) p. 323.

<sup>3</sup>B. von Wiese, Die deutsche Tragödie von Lessing bis Hebbel, 4th ed. (Hamburg, 1948), II, 334.





the essence of Prinz Friedrich von Homburg:

To poetize Prussia- to dissolve its explicit denotative outlines in the soft focus of patriotic feeling, to give the harsh rectangularity of its matrix the gentler curvature of a womb- this must have seemed to Kleist a very seductive way out of his dilemma.<sup>1</sup>

The Marxists, Mayer and Lukács, try to fit their ideology into political interpretations of the play by emphasizing its unprussianness. Kleist is called "modern" and a "rebel" in the sense that he did not conform to the society of his day. The Prinz von Homburg, therefore, signals a dissatisfaction with Prussia and the beginnings of a movement favorable to socialism. According to Mayer:

Im Prinz von Homburg wird alles Zusammenklang. Aber das Schauspiel klingt nicht zusammen mit dem Ort und der Zeit, worin es geschaffen wurde. Alles hatte Kleist in sich aufgenommen, über alles war er hinaus- gelangt. Er dichtete nicht bloß einen Wendepunkt des preußischen Staates, sondern einen Wendepunkt der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft seiner Zeit.<sup>2</sup>

Many parallels to the play have been found in other works of art, so that critics surmise that Kleist borrowed a good deal from other authors as well as from history. A painting by Kretschmar (1800) and a copper engraving by Chodowiecki (1790), depicting the Battle of Fehrbellin, are possible tangible sources of inspiration.<sup>3</sup> The vision in the fifth act of Egmont is possibly the forerunner of the

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<sup>1</sup>S. Burckhardt, "Heinrich von Kleist: The Poet as Prussian", Centennial Review, VIII (1964), 444.

<sup>2</sup>H. Mayer, Heinrich von Kleist; der geschichtliche Augenblick (Pfullingen, 1962), p. 52.

<sup>3</sup>All these sources can be found in Passage, pp. xvii ff.





dream scene in Prinz Friedrich von Homburg. Blankenagel shows how every character in Wallenstein has his counterpart in the Prinz von Homburg.<sup>1</sup> Meta Corssen compares the play with Shakespeare's Measure for Measure and a Midsummernights-dream.<sup>2</sup> S. Burckhardt, in a recent article, tries to show the interpretation and criticism of Egmont implicit in the construction of Prinz Friedrich von Homburg.<sup>3</sup> In suggesting Schiller's "Kampf mit dem Drachen", Samuel broaches the important question of the differences between the play and any source adduced for it:

Schiller's ballad is a straightforward tale of an erring young knight who, driven by noble motives and the dictates of his heart, breaks the chief rule of his Order, realizes his fault, contritely accepts punishment and receives mercy in consequence.<sup>4</sup>

The distinction between right and wrong is not so apparent in Prinz Friedrich von Homburg, Samuel points out, and the motivation of the Prince's premature attack is a more important element in Kleist's play.

A further source considered is Kleist's own psychic conflicts and personality, and these are related to those of

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<sup>1</sup>J. C. Blankenagel, "Wallenstein und Prinz Friedrich von Homburg", Germanic Review, II (1927), 1-11.

<sup>2</sup>M. Corssen, Kleist und Shakespeare (Weimar, 1930), pp. 37 ff.

<sup>3</sup>S. Burckhardt, "Egmont and Prinz Friedrich von Homburg", German Quarterly, XXXVI (1963), 113.

<sup>4</sup>Samuel, 1962 ed., p. 37



his characters in order to explain their motivation. Passage says, for example, that "the Prince is the author's alter ego, created by him to endure and succeed where he in real life had failed."<sup>1</sup> Brooke suggests that it is not surprising to find an excess of feelings and emotions in Kleist's characters, since he, himself, continually struggled with his excess of feelings which threatened to engulf him.<sup>2</sup> The implication is that Prince Friedrich reacts as he does because he embodies Kleist's psychological and sexual frustrations. On the assumption that "[Kleist's] works are best approached from the point where life and art converge,"<sup>3</sup> Muth, Scott, and Cassirer have investigated the bearing of Kleist's philosophical crisis of 1801 in the play. Scott maintains that if one is prepared to accept Kleist's greatest play as his "Faust" and a distillation of his life and thought, there is much in the play that can be traced back to Fichte and Kant.<sup>4</sup>

Further studies have been done to determine the influence of great men such as Hölderlin, Fouqué, Rousseau,

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<sup>1</sup>Passage, p. vii.

<sup>2</sup>F. J. Brooke, "The Male-Female Relationships in the Dramas and Novellen of Heinrich von Kleist", Dissertation (Chapel Hill, 1954), p. 6.

<sup>3</sup>"Heinrich von Kleist", The Times, Literary Supplement, No. 2 (August 21, 1953), 690.

<sup>4</sup>D. F. S. Scott, "Heinrich von Kleist's Kant Crisis" Modern Language Review, XLII (1947), 483.





Goethe, and Shakespeare on Kleist. Donald Crosby, tracing the influence of Schiller on Kleist in his works and letters, comes to the conclusion that Kleist "identified himself with the subject of national liberation so passionately that he made it the subject of his final poetic legacy to the German people, the dramas Die Hermannsschlacht and Prinz Friedrich von Homburg."<sup>1</sup>

Prinz Friedrich von Homburg has been interpreted as Kleist's life story. Henschell suggests that: "This drama, like all great works of art, emanates, of course, from the author's own experience of and outlook on life, and, perhaps even more, from the unfathomed depths of his conscious and unconscious self."<sup>2</sup> More specifically he lists the themes which recur in Kleist's letters and which are evident in the play:

. . . conflict with authority (777), the Kantian ethic (1375), the unreliability of the world (910), the solitude of the ostracized (stage directions 775-6, also 979), the craving for parental love (67/8, 830, 1765), the religious tendency (408-15), the desire for wife and child (65, 1047), the reliance on 'Gefühl' (868), and its defeat through Verwirrung (772, 897-907), the threat of determinism (1286-96), the free assertion of the ego in defiance of mortality (1749-52), and the persistent pre-crisis and post-crisis 'Sternenglaube', implying an endless succession of deaths and rebirths . . . <sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>D. H. Crosby, "The Creative Kinship of Schiller and Kleist", Monatshefte, LIII (1961), 262.

<sup>2</sup>A. J. Henschel, "The Primacy of Free-will in the Mind of Kleist and in the Prinz von Homburg", German Life and Letters, N.S., XVII (1964), 104.

<sup>3</sup>Henschel, p. 97.



Zweig traces the sexual implications of Kleist's restlessness in his works and agrees that Prinz Friedrich von Homburg is:

...Kleistens wahrstes Drama, weil es sein ganzes Leben enthält. Alle Überkreuzungen und Überschneidungen seines Wesens sind darin, die Lebensliebe und die Todesnot, die Zucht und der Überschwang, das Ererbte, und das Erlernte: nur hier, wo er sich ganz erschöpft, wird er ganz wahr über sein eigenes Wissen hinaus.<sup>1</sup>

The idea that Prinz Friedrich is a final stage in the development of Kleist's thought has led to much discussion of his attitude toward death. The majority of critics consider that the Prinz von Homburg has a "happy ending", and therefore it is often assumed that Kleist successfully resolved in the play what he was unable to resolve in his life. Although Kleist committed suicide soon after completing the play, it is still considered optimistically, "a stage of development that might well have enabled Kleist to overcome his inward and outward distress."<sup>2</sup> Kleist's obsession with death then is a theme which runs through the whole of his life and culminates in the figure of the Prince, who in the "Todesfurchtszene" overcomes his horror of it. The Prince is apparently successful in attaining, at the conclusion of the play, all that he had aspired to in the first scene, such as military glory and the love of Natalie; these

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<sup>1</sup>S. Zweig, Baumeister der Welt (Frankfurt am Main, 1951), p.290.

<sup>2</sup>The Times, Literary Supplement, p. 690





are the goals which Kleist desired in life, but failed to attain. The resolution of the Prince's problems (if one is of the opinion that his conflicts are resolved), would then be a suggested solution to Kleist's struggle to reconcile himself with society. Silz, however, has not seen the ending so positively: "One fears that the Prince, in some future crisis, will find the present solution inadequate, and will see no refuge but in death. And that is what Kleist himself did."<sup>1</sup>

The conclusions drawn from research into biographical, sociological, or historical sources are contradictory in nature. Samuel, for example, agrees that the final result of Prinz Friedrich von Homburg is not what he believes Kleist originally intended; that is, "another passionate appeal to patriotic impulses and national sentiments",<sup>2</sup> but tries to show how the play transformed itself into Kleist's life story in an attempt to resolve the problems with which he was beset. Neither of these suggestions is very helpful in interpretation.

The genetic approach implies that the sources of a work of art and the reasons for which it was written are directly proportional to, and necessary for, the under-

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<sup>1</sup>W. Silz, "On the Interpretation of Kleist's Prinz Friedrich von Homburg", Journal of English and Germanic Philology, XXXV (1936), 516.

<sup>2</sup>Samuel, 1962 ed., p. 37.





standing of the finished product. Wellek and Warren argue that:

The whole view that art is self-expression pure and simple, the transcript of personal feelings and experiences, is demonstrably false. Even when there is a close relationship between the work of art and the life of an author, this must never be construed as meaning that the work of art is a mere copy of life.<sup>1</sup>

Whether or not Kleist was aware that he was at war with himself and society, using Prinz Friedrich von Homburg as an interpretation of his life and vice-versa results in too much emphasis being placed on isolated aspects of the play. It is then never seen as a whole. The Prince's reaction to his sentence and his open grave can be better understood from the play, than from inferences from Kleist's life which isolate it from the context. Fehrbellin, Frederick II and a military atmosphere are all reminiscent of Prussian society, but Prinz Friedrich von Homburg has many non-Prussian elements.

Sources can be a positive menace (not just relatively peripheral), when a sound observation is written off as an anomaly.<sup>2</sup> An item, which is not identifiable in Prinz Friedrich but significant in its apparent source, is not relevant to the play. The play is its own evidence. The profusion of <sup>that</sup> sources shows the attempt to pin down any one is futile. The only real source is Kleist and all he experienced.

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<sup>1</sup>R. Wellek and A. Warren, Theory of Literature, 2nd ed. (New York, 1955), p. 66.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Fürstenheim's observation of the father-son relationship of the Elector and the Prince, which will be discussed in Chapter II. See above, p. 7.





### 3. Interpretations

Themes such as "death", "insubordination", and "trust", have received much discussion in the criticism of Prinz Friedrich von Homburg, as well as antitheses, such as "law-feeling", "dream-reality", "subjectivity-objectivity", "individual-society", and "duty-inclination". Attitudes taken in these discussions, however, depend to a large extent on a fundamental divergence of opinion on the nature of the conflict between the Prince and the Elector. Silz, Hafner, Guder and many more critics concur that interpretations fall generally into three categories which depend mainly on the decision to view one or other of the two as the hero of Prinz Friedrich von Homburg. Fricke says, for example:

H. Engert hat drei Gruppen der Interpretation unterschieden: Die eine sieht die Idee der Dichtung in der Verherrlichung des Gesetzes und der Pflicht, des Anspruchs der Gemeinschaft gegenüber dem Individuum. Die andere findet im Prinzen, genau entgegengesetzt, den Triumph der genialen Persönlichkeit, den Sieg des subjektiven Gefühls. Eine dritte schließlich erblickt gerade in der Harmonisierung beider Pole die versöhnende Leistung dieses letzten Dramas Kleists.<sup>1</sup>

The oldest theory, which I will refer to from now on as the "Education" theory, was set forth by Tieck in 1821. It has often been challenged and has undergone many modifications, but still has adherents today. The Elector is considered

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<sup>1</sup>G.Fricke, Gefühl und Schicksal bei Heinrich von Kleist (Berlin, 1929), p. 170.



very wise and is actively involved in a didactic mission to educate and nurture the foolhardy Prince to an understanding of the law and society. Diametrically opposed to this opinion, but also didactic in purpose, is the interpretation which argues for the supremacy of the outstanding individual over the dictates of society. The Elector is forced to revise his philosophy from the example of the Prince. These two hypotheses are offered in the play, but do not necessarily cancel each other. Hence other critics like to see the play ending in a compromise, where both the Elector and the Prince undergo a change in thinking and come to a satisfactory understanding of each other. In order to point out just where the ambiguity in Prinz Friedrich von Homburg lies and to evaluate their weakness and usefulness, these three theories will now be discussed individually in greater detail. This procedure will both evaluate them and shed some light on the curious circumstance that a play should have provoked such persistently divergent views over a long period of time.

### 3a. The "Education" theory

The "Education" theory was first set forth by Tieck, who stated in the "Vorrede" to the first edition of Kleist's works:





Die wichtige Frage, was Subordination sei . . . wird vor uns in Handlung, in Form eines großen dramatischen Prozesses entwickelt. Alles wird in den mannigfaltigen Situationen, durch das verletzte Gefühl des Prinzen, durch die Umstände selbst, durch die Freunde des Verurteilten auf eine würdige Art ausgesprochen, und immer durch den großgezeichneten Charakter des Kurfürsten mit wenigen Worten zur Ruhe verwiesen. Der Prinz selbst erkennt nach einer großen Erschütterung sein Unrecht, er weiht sich dem Vaterlande und dem verletzten Recht, und die freie Begnadigung des Fürsten, die er sich weder durch Drohung, Überredung noch Überraschung ablisten ließ, beruhigt und befriedigt jedes Gefühl.<sup>1</sup>

That is to say: an impetuous youth disobeys orders and is condemned to death by the law for this insubordination. The Elector, in contrast to the Prince, is unperturbed, serene, purposeful, and constant in character. He engages in a program to teach the Prince respect and acceptance of law and authority. Once he learns to subordinate his self-interest to the good of the state, the Prince becomes a real hero and a man.

As early as 1827, H. G. Hotho challenged the "Education" theory as being an over-simplification of the problematic relationship between the Prince and the Elector.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, recent critics, such as Guder, Mathieu, Salm and Benson continue to accept it as basic to their interpretations. Because the Prince's approval of the Elector's

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<sup>1</sup>Heinrich von Kleists hinterlassene Schriften, ed. Ludwig Tieck (Berlin, 1921), p. lxiv. Cf. H. Gilow, "Heinrich von Kleists Prinz Friedrich von Homburg 1821-1921", Jahrbuch der Kleist-Gesellschaft, I (1921), 26-27.

<sup>2</sup>Henschell, p. 97.





condemnation is the key to execution or pardon, Mathieu refers to the Elector as a leader relying on the adept use of psychology; the Prince is brought to a realization of his guilt by the Elector's success in evoking in him a sense of duty and self-sacrificing devotion that transcends his ego.<sup>1</sup> Salm,<sup>2</sup> tracing the motifs of "confidence" and the "miraculous" in Prinz Friedrich von Homburg, is in accord with Guder that: "The crux of the drama is to show how the Elector's confidence awakens in Homburg the strength to accept the death sentence as just."<sup>3</sup> Benson argues that the goodness of the Elector is necessary for the understanding of the play; he never intended to have the Prince executed:

The Kurfürst's warning mention of the two lost victories, the fact that veteran Kottwitz has a share in the Prince's command, Dörfling's anxiety about the Prince, which leads him to try to see Kottwitz before the battle, all show that the Prince is not the young hero he believes himself to be, but an inexperienced youth being tried out by anxious seniors and causing a lot of trouble.<sup>4</sup>

Adherents of the "Education" theory agree that the

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<sup>1</sup>G. Mathieu, "The Struggle for a Man's Mind", German Life and Letters, N.S., XIII (1959-60), 173-174.

<sup>2</sup>P. Salm, "Confidence and the Miraculous in Kleist's Prinz Friedrich von Homburg", German Quarterly, XXXIV (1961), 238-247.

<sup>3</sup>G. Guder, "The Prince and the Elector", Modern Languages, XXXV (1953-1954), 90.

<sup>4</sup>J. M. Benson, "Kleist's Prinz Friedrich von Homburg", Modern Languages, XLVI (1965), 100.





play concludes, as Tieck says, on a joyful note; everyone submits to, and integrates with, law and authority. Through his vicarious experience of death, the Prince has come to grips with reality and is duly rewarded by the Elector. The Elector thus emerges unconditionally victorious over the Prince. A benevolent but impregnable sovereign, he foresees events before they happen and manipulates the self-centered and undisciplined youth, leading him away from his dream-world to subordinate himself to the law and deserve pardon. According to this interpretation, the Prince has undergone a change in his thinking, while the character of his superior remains constant.

Some didactic and moralistic interpretations have pushed the "Education" theory to its limits. The Elector is elevated from a wise father-figure, giving the Prince worldly advice, to a secular god or a divine ruler.<sup>1</sup> According to Hubbs, for example, he becomes an allegorized figure-- the symbol of the "wise man", with superhuman qualities of justice.<sup>2</sup> R. Schneider argues that the play is an appeal against that kind of power which in its destructive rigidity believes itself the final arbiter, ignorant of the fact that all power springs from the grace of God and has claim to

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<sup>1</sup>F. Braig, Heinrich von Kleist (Munich, 1925), pp. 380 and 384 ff.

<sup>2</sup>V. C. Hubbs, "Heinrich von Kleist and the Symbol of the Wise Man", Symposium, XVI (1962), 170.





exist only if it is tempered by mercy.<sup>1</sup> S. Burckhardt says that divine and political orders are identical; that Kleist saw the Prince's fate under the aspect of the archetypal drama of man's fall and redemption. The state is the ultimate order; divine order is secularized.<sup>2</sup> Mohr compares the Elector to God as He appears in Parzival,<sup>3</sup> and Koch draws a complete religious analogy between the relationship of God and man, and of the Elector and the Prince.<sup>4</sup> In the religious context, the death scene results in the "Wiedergeburt" of the Prince, and the garden scenes are often compared to the Garden of Eden as described in "Über das Marionettentheater".<sup>5</sup>

Patriotic German schoolmasters and Nationalists have been unable to resist the propanganda potential of an "Erziehungsexperiment.". The Elector is considered to symbolize the spirit of the "Fatherland". As the embodiment of law, he cannot break it. The individual, following the example of the Prince, should voluntarily submit himself for the betterment of his country. Obedience is necessary to the

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<sup>1</sup>R. Schneider, "Kleist's Ende", Neues Abendland, I (1946-1947), 6-19.

<sup>2</sup>Burckhardt, "H.von K; The Poet as Prussian", p. 446.

<sup>3</sup>W. Mohr, "Parallelen zwischen deutscher Dichtung des Mittelalters und der Neuzeit", Euphorion, L (1956), 129-161.

<sup>4</sup>F. Koch, Heinrich von Kleist; Bewußtsein und Wirklichkeit (Stuttgart, 1958), pp. 244-262.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. von Wiese, Die Deutsche Tragödie, p. 339.



building of a strong military society. In 1903, Max Osborn wrote of Prinz Friedrich von Homburg:

Hier liegt der Kern des kleistschen Dramas: es ist die unvergleichliche poetische Verherrlichung des preußischen Gedankens der Zucht, des Sieges über den Trotz, der Unterordnung des einzelnen unter die großen Rücksichten der Staatsraison, als deren Vertreter der Kurfürst vor uns steht.<sup>1</sup>

Julian Bab saw the play as an example of Prussian superiority in his book, Preußen und der deutsche Geist (1916): "Das Preußentum erscheint hier in seiner schärfsten Form, in seinem innersten Nerv, so vergeistigt, daß es Tragkraft gewinnt, um Fundament eines großen menschlichen Erziehungsgedichts zu werden."<sup>2</sup> The moral of the Prinz von Homburg as a "Schulbeispiel patriotischer Erziehung" is, therefore, that the individual, acting on arrogant reliance of his private judgment, will fail, but the state can reclaim him by wise pedagogic management.

It is the Prince, not the Elector, who puts forth the idea that his sovereign must have a didactic purpose and would not condemn him arbitrarily. (The Elector has apparently raised the Prince from a child as a gardner nurtures a plant.) The "Education" theory runs into difficulty especially when it ascribes simple motives to the Elector.

<sup>1</sup>Quoted by Gilow, p. 43.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 47. See above pp.8-9, where the Prussian character of Prinz Friedrich von Homburg was related to Kleist's nationalism. Here Bab uses it to support his twentieth century nationalism.







His actions seldom agree with what one would expect of a person of "mild" temperament, and his unpredictability is just one of the facets of his character which make him interesting and unconventional. Acting on the premise that a Prussian Elector could never be incompetent, upholders of the popular

"Education" theory have refused to see otherwise. Even those adherents of this theory, such as Hubbs, who consider the Prince heroic because he could not be the idol of a whole army if incompetent, cannot deny that Prince Friedrich has lost two previous battles and appears in many unheroic situations. These facts should lead one to question the competence of the man who put him in command. Furthermore, the Elector reveals time and again his "Verwirrung", and the fact that he is not always informed of what is happening.<sup>1</sup> Müller-Seidel, von Wiese, Fricke, Schultze-Jahde, Silz and Hafner are among the many well-known Kleist critics who have been dissatisfied with the "Education" theory, especially because of its wholesale acceptance of the Elector's values.

### 3b. The Prince as "hero"

There is a school of criticism which argues for the superiority of Prince Friedrich over the Elector.

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<sup>1</sup>See II.x.742; IV.i.1174; V.i-ii; for example.



Some interpretations which argue that the Elector learns from the Prince's example are little more than reactions to the "Education" theory. These generally use the Prince as an expression of a political bias. The concepts of "Gefühl", "Schicksal", "Wirklichkeit", and "Traum", which are traceable in most of Kleist's works, have been thoroughly explored in discussions centering around the Prince. Accepting the Prince as a "hero" is a basic assumption of this type of interpretation.

As early as 1858, Julian Schmidt took the position that the Prince represents free heroism and is completely triumphant over the dead letter of the law. This idea had a particular nationalistic appeal during the Youth Movement of the 1900's and the Nazi years. According to H. Gilow's survey of Kleist criticism from 1821 to 1921, one critic named Matkowsky

. . . wollte, wie er in einem Feuilletonaufsatz 1913 ausspricht, nicht einzig aus Gründen der Gewohnheit und Bequemlichkeit immer auf falschen Pfaden anderen nachtrotten, sondern macht sich daran, zu erweisen, daß der Prinz von Homburg den Kampf der Jugend, die in freien Idealen lebt, gegen das Alter, das in Formalismus und Rechthaberei erstarrt ist, darstellt. Der Kurfürst sei der pedantische Autokrat, der sich in schikanöser Quälerei anderer gefalle, und dürfe nicht als jovialer Herr gespielt werden!<sup>2</sup>

In a less nationalistic vein, twentieth century German critics refer to the triumph of the highly gifted personality and subjective feeling or "Gefühl". Owing to

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<sup>1</sup>J. Schmidt, Geschichte der deutschen Literatur seit Lessings Tod, 4th ed., II (Leipzig, 1858), 281.

<sup>2</sup>Gilow, p. 48.





their concern with justifying the Prince, Fricke, Hafner, Müller-Seidel, von Wiese, Wittkowski, and others, have not always divorced themselves from the ideal picture of the Elector, set up in the "Education" theory. The same basic antithesis, the conflict of the emotions of the individual with the dictates of society, is, in general, common to the two theories. . Fricke sums up accurately the majority of opinions on Prinz Friedrich von Homburg:

Und zwar findet man, bei aller Differenz in der Beurteilung der Nebenmotive und -personen, die Grundidee der Dichtung im Ausgleich von Individuum und Gemeinschaft, von Gefühl und Gesetz, Subjektivismus und Objektivismus, Neigung und Pflicht. Man ist sich weithin darin einig, daß der Prinz von Homburg als die reinste, abgeklärteste Schöpfung Kleists die Zerrissenheit seines Daseins und seiner Dichtung in eine schöne Harmonie auflöst.<sup>1</sup>

Those who argue that Prince Friedrich is victorious in bringing the Elector to realize the necessity of individual expression in a military state, and those who argue conversely that the Elector is educating the Prince to the acceptance of his views, agree that the ending of Prinz Friedrich von Homburg is positive.

The most popular trend in modern German criticism is to discuss the Prince's struggle between dream and reality, and between feelings and law, in metaphysical terms. Probably the best summary of this approach is given by Wittkowski, who first points out the more general assumptions of accepting the Prince as "hero", and the innovations introduced by G.

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<sup>1</sup>Fricke, Gefühl und Schicksal, p. 170.





Fricke.<sup>1</sup> Wittkowski believes that most modern interpretations are combinations of the views which he discusses:

Kleist's letztes Drama gilt nach wie vor als krönende Synthese seines Schaffens. Und auch den Kernvorgang des Schauspiels, den inneren Aufstieg des Helden, versteht man gern als dialektischen Dreischritt, gipfelnd mit der versöhnenden Synthese ursprünglicher Gegensätze: Der Prinz in seinem radikalen Freiheitsstreben stoße auf den Widerspruch des Gesetzes, erkenne seine Schuld, überwinde seine Selbstsucht und unterwerfe sich der Gemeinschaft, dem Gesetz. Entsprechend wandle sich der Kurfürst, sofern er nicht gottgleich über dem Ganzen spreche, vom strengen Hüter des Gesetzes zum Schutzherrn auch der lieblichen Gefühle-Versöhnung zwischen Staat und Individuum, Synthese von Gesetz und Freiheit.

Seit Gerhard Fricke kennt man daneben eine andere Sicht. Da ist die Rede nicht von Umkehr, Unterwerfung, sondern von existentieller Selbstwerdung des Prinzen rein in seiner Subjektivität; Staat und Gesetz erscheinen ohne eigenes Gewicht und empfangen allen Glanz vom Ich des Helden, der sich ihnen zuwendet, sie trägt und heiligt. Sein Aufstieg vollzieht sich gemäß den Reflexionen 'Über das Marionettentheater' als Dreischritt vom paradiesisch reinen Gefühl über das verwirrte endliche zum unendlichen Gefühl.<sup>2</sup>

Gerhard Fricke's discussions of the philosophical aspects of the Prince's dilemma have had a great influence on most modern German criticism of the Prinz von Homburg. Refuting the theory that the Elector is wisely educating the Prince in Studien und Interpretationen, Fricke defends the Prince's right to base his decisions on his "Gefühl", and attempts to show that he is successful in the end because he

<sup>1</sup>According to the "Education" theory, the Prince becomes a hero only because he follows the advice of the Elector. In the theories that consider the Prince as "hero", Homburg is heroic from the beginning.

<sup>2</sup>W. Wittkowski, "Absolutes Gefühl und absolute Kunst in Kleists Prinz Friedrich von Homburg", Der Deutschunterricht, XIII (1961), 27.





remains constant throughout the play.<sup>1</sup> In Gefühl und Schicksal, Fricke develops his ideas in more detail. He rejects the relationship between individual and idea as the fundamental theme of the play because it is "unkleistisch". Kleist's concern in Prinz Friedrich von Homburg, Fricke asserts, was to find a purpose for existing: the natural religious desire for the individual to find himself in society:

. . . Kleist, dem es nicht ideal auf ein Thema und ein Problem ankam, dessen Menschen nicht Typen, Versichtbarungen der Bewegung der Idee sind, sondern der das Dasein und die Existenz des Ich in seiner unergründlichen Tatsächlichkeit zum einzigen "Gegenstand" seiner Dichtung machte.<sup>2</sup>

In the earthly existence of the Prince lies the question of the eternal which is answered at the end of the play. At the beginning of the play the Prince is without experience of his eternal self:

Der Prinz von Homburg führt das Ich, den Einzelnen zum Erlebnis seiner Bestimmung gegenüber Volk und Staat, den der Kurfürst verkörpert, zur Erkenntnis der eigentliche Quelle seines Rechtes, seiner unbedingten Autorität.<sup>3</sup>

Although the Elector is considered to be the embodiment of the state, he does not lose all his human qualities. He is not an ideal figure, internally unchangeable and possessing the wisdom and superiority of a "God" who guides the destiny

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<sup>1</sup>G. Fricke, Studien und Interpretationen (Frankfurt am Main, 1956), pp. 239, 245, and 262.

<sup>2</sup>Fricke, Gefühl und Schicksal, p. 192

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 177.



of the Prince. The Elector is a genuine antagonist of the Prince and also is subject to the play of forces. The progress of the Prince's "Gefühl" and his recognition of his eternal self is felt by Fricke to be the crux of the Prinz von Homburg. The Elector does not make the Prince obey some abstract law, but helps him to find his true self, his true reality and destiny. By the final scenes of the play:

. . . Die Heiligkeit des Gesetzes ist kein vergötztetes, fremdes Trugbild mehr, das die Wirklichkeit des Ich vernichtet, sondern das Gesetz ist nur Schöpfung und Setzung des Ich, aber nicht des endlichen Subjekts, sondern des ewigen Ich, der Seele, des Gefühls, und in der Heiligkeit des Gesetzes spiegelt und bewährt sich nur die Ewigkeit des Ich und seine erfüllte göttliche Bestimmung, --denn diese und nichts anderes ist Grund, Inhalt und Recht des "Gesetzes". <sup>1</sup>

Both the Elector and the Prince rely on their "Gefühl". The Prince sees the Elector as a despot, (III,i), because his trust was not genuine at first. It stemmed from impulsive subjectivity, not from eternal "Gefühl". The Elector's trust of the Prince's "Gefühl" contains the eternal, "das Ewige", in itself as it originates from the subordination of the subjective and individual to the holy law. The solution of Prinz Friedrich von Homburg lies, therefore, according to Fricke, in the surpassing of the Elector by the Prince, who finally recognizes his eternal immortal self. Thus an answer to the religious question of "Gefühl", which appears in all Kleist's works is given in the Prinz von Homburg.

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<sup>1</sup>Fricke, Gefühl und Schicksal, p. 191.







Pointing out the discrepancies which result if one holds the Elector to be either purely tyrannical or pedagogic, Koch no longer considers him a person,<sup>1</sup> but a symbol of reality, which in coöperation with the law brings about a change in the Prince's understanding of reality:

Der Kurfürst aber ruht in sich selbst, steht dem Prinzen in voller Freiheit gegenüber und gelangt im Verlauf der Dichtung zu solcher Mächtigkeit und solchem Leben, wie kaum sonst eine Gestalt, so daß uns gar nicht bewußt wird, wie verschiedenartig und entgegengesetzt und rational unvereinbar die Züge seines Wesens und Handelns sind.<sup>2</sup>

After examining the Prince's relationship to the dream-reality antithesis, Koch feels, in contrast to Fricke, that the Prince is, in part, responsible for his actions. From the very beginning, Homburg is engrossed in his own aspirations and dreams. Although this seems to be his inherent weakness, his behaviour before the battle is completely irresponsible. Koch disagrees with Schultze-Jahde that the Elector changes from tyrant to benevolent ruler, and with Lugowski that the Prince is morally superior throughout the play. The main theme, Koch feels, is not the "individual versus the state", but the individual's struggle with reality. He agrees with Joachim Müller, for whom Prinz Friedrich von Homburg concerns

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<sup>1</sup>See above, pp. 20-21. The Elector was considered to be super-human by extension of the "Education" theory; here he is dehumanized.

<sup>2</sup>Koch, p. 229.



. . . nicht nur den Gegensatz von individueller Willkür und Staatsgedanken, von Initiative und Disziplin, von Ichbehauptung und Gesetzesordnung, von Eigenanspruch und Gehorsamspflicht an. Das alles ist wichtig, aber es steht doch noch im Vordergrund der Aktion. In den Kern erst geht die Kleistsche Grundfrage nach dem Bestand der Wirklichkeit überhaupt, nach der allerdings konkreten, an das Hier und Jetzt der geschichtlichen Stunde gebundenen Seinsbewährung des Menschen, nach dem Verhältnis von Schein und Sein. Die dramatisch-dichterische Sinnmitte ist die Spannung zwischen romantischem Traumwandel und der Schonungslos sich enthüllenden Struktur der Wirklichkeit, zwischen überschäumenden Glücksgefühl und entsetzlicher Todesfurcht, zwischen lyrischem Subjektivismus und objekt-bestimmter Disziplin, zwischen zarter Seelenmusik und greller Schlachtfanfane.<sup>1</sup>

Von Wiese is concerned mainly with the conflict between the state and the individual. The Prince is not a Prussian hero, but a puppet who, because of his reliance on feeling, does not recognize the law. Like Fricke, von Wiese feels that the death scene is the climax of the tragedy-- the Prince's ego changes into a tragic ego. The Elector, who embodies the state, is finally successful in appealing to the Prince's "Gefühl", making the law a concrete reality:

Denn das "Soll" des Prinzen ist nicht ein Kantischer kategorischer Imperative der Pflicht, sondern ein individueller Imperativ des Gefühls.

Der Prinz wächst über seinen Traum hinaus und nimmt die Wirklichkeit des Staates in sein eigenes Gefühl auf; damit ist er über den Widerstreit des Subjektiven und Objektiven hinauslangt zu einer freien Bejahung seines Schicksals. Seine Gestalt, die zunächst so befremdend in der brandenburgisch-preußischen Welt in Erscheinung trat, wird zu einer leben-

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<sup>1</sup>J. Müller, "Zum Verständnis von Kleists Prinz Friedrich von Homburg", Weimarer Beiträge, II (1956), 414.







spendenden Kraft innerhalb des Staates, die den "Feind" vernichtet.<sup>1</sup>

Wittkowski says that the subjective is an absolute standard for the Prince. "Die Wechselwirkung zwischen 'Ich' und 'Welt', 'Bewußtsein' und 'Realität'" is intensive but inadequate as a total explanation of Prinz Friedrich von Homburg. "Der Mensch täuscht sich über seine Umwelt und löst andere Wirkungen aus, als er beabsichtigt."<sup>2</sup>

Müller-Seidel disagrees with von Wiese that: "es geht . . . um die Entwicklung vom Individuum zur Gemeinschaft, um das Verhältnis des einzelnen zum Staat oder auch, wie man gesagt hat, um das allmähliche Reifen zum Staatsbürger."<sup>3</sup> Stressing the importance of the initial scene in establishing the Prince's relationship to "Gefühl", Müller-Seidel suggests also some revisions of Fricke; namely,

. . . daß man nicht mehr von der Willkür des verwirrten, sondern vom Unwillkürlichen des herrlichen Gefühls ausgeht. Wir haben zu fragen, ob die Alternativen zu Recht bestehen: ob es neben der

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<sup>1</sup> von Wiese, Die deutsche Tragödie, pp. 339, 333-334. H. Kreuzer, "Kleist Literatur 1955-1960", Deutsche Unterricht, XIII (1961), 121, says that von Wiese's Die deutsche Tragödie von Lessing bis Hebbel: "darf als der 'klassische' Beitrag der Nachkriegsepoche zur Interpretation der Tragödie gelten, zugleich als die Grundlage der heutigen communis opinio in bezug auf die Dramen Kleists."

<sup>2</sup> Wittkowski, p. 34.

<sup>3</sup> W. Müller-Seidel, "Kleist. Prinz Friedrich von Homburg", in: B. von Wiese, Das deutsche Drama vom Barok bis zur Gegenwart, I (Düsseldorf, 1958), 385.



Schuld der Willkür und neben der Schuldlosigkeit des Unwillkürlichen nicht noch ein Drittes gibt. Eine genauere Betrachtung der Eingangsszene wird unerlässlich. Fast entscheidet das Verhältnis dieser Szene über das Verständnis des ganzen Dramas.<sup>1</sup>

Prinz Friedrich von Homburg could then be considered an "Enthüllungsdrama". "Erkennen" is more important than "Entwicklung." Müller-Seidel sees no change in either the Elector or Prince: "Der Prinz ist kein Werdender, auch wenn er am Ende ein anderer ist, als er am Anfang war. Er ist so wenig ein Werdender, wie es der Kurfürst ist."<sup>2</sup>

Hafner, whose greatest contribution to the Prinz von Homburg research is his discussion of style and metaphor, agrees that "Gefühl" is the basic theme of the play and that the Prince undergoes a metamorphosis which brings him up to the level of the Elector. His tendency to reduce the characters to concepts renders much of his interpretation overgeneralized: "Der Fall des Prinzen von Homburg ist Symbol für das Schicksal des Menschen schlechthin."<sup>3</sup> "Kottwitz verkörpert auf die schönste Weise die deutsche Intimität, er begegnet jedem vertraut."<sup>4</sup>

Schlagdenhauffen describes the dilemma of the

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<sup>1</sup>Müller-Seidel, "Prinz Friedrich von Homburg", p. 388.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, p. 401.

<sup>3</sup>F. Hafner, Heinrich von Kleists "Prinz Friedrich von Homburg" (Zürich, 1952), p. 79.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 59.







individual cut off from society and the disharmony of his universe in the light of existentialist philosophy:

Absurde cet univers où l'élan génial est méconnu, où l'action personnelle est incompatible avec la loi, où la loi est tyrannique et la grâce arbitraire, où une plaisanterie engendre une faute et entraîne la mort de l'innocent, où le sentiment est trompeur et la pensée logique en contradiction avec le réel.<sup>1</sup>

He assumes that the Elector is benevolent and is more concerned with the plight of the Prince, whom he sees as the lonely hero confronted by the absurdity of life.

Common to most modern German critics, such as von Wiese, Müller-Seidel, Hafner, Fricke and Wittkowski, are frequent references to Kleist's philosophical tract, "Über das Marionettentheater", and comparisons of the Prinz von Homburg to music. Prince Friedrich is considered a marionette, and therefore, in the context of Kleist's essay, something to be envied and emulated. In describing the Prince's experience after seeing his open grave, Blöcker employs the language of "Das Marionettentheater". Homburg "mußte 'wieder von dem Baum der Erkenntnis essen, um in den Stand der Unschuld zurückzufallen.'"<sup>2</sup> Mathieu sees the Elector as the satanic manipulator of a dangling marionette who challenges the Prince to be a man.<sup>3</sup> Von Wiese says of the Prinz von

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<sup>1</sup>A. Schlagdenhauffen, L'univers existentiel de Kleist dans le prince de Homburg (Paris, 1953), p. 102.

<sup>2</sup>G. Blöcker, Heinrich von Kleist, oder Das absolute Ich (Berlin, 1960), p. 195.

<sup>3</sup>Mathieu, p. 171.



Homburg: "Hier stehen wir wie in der Penthesilea beim 'letzten Kapital der Welt.'"<sup>1</sup> According to Hafner, "Der Prinz Friedrich von Homburg erzählt auf seine Weise das 'dritte Kapitel vom ersten Buch Moses' welches nach jener Bemerkung im "Marionettentheater" den Grund zur gesamten Geschichte der Menschheit bildet."<sup>2</sup>

Similarly the symmetrical structure of the play is described by a music metaphor: "Um sie zu erfassen, müssen wir die Dichtung musikalisch, das heißt in ihrem inneren Bewegungsablauf und der Weise ihrer Stimmführung, verstehen."<sup>3</sup> Statements, such as the following, are common:

Das Drama weist in seiner Struktur eine grosse Ähnlichkeit mit dem Bau eines Sonatensatzes auf. Der erste und zweite Akt entsprechen der Exposition, der dritte und vierte der Durchführung, und der fünfte Akt ist der Reprise gleichzusetzen.<sup>4</sup>

Thus form has become as important to criticism as content.

The very metaphysical style of many modern critics is usually indicative of vague generalities and circular arguments. The following excerpt from Fricke's Gefühl und Schicksal should serve as an example:

. . . Der Prinz lebt zu Beginn der Dichtung noch ohne das Erlebnis seines ewigen Selbst. Das offenbart die Traumszene, in der, wie nie im wachen, bewußten Leben der Gehalt seines Daseins, das leidenschaftliche, glückverlangende Streben nach Ruhm und

<sup>1</sup> von Wiese, Die deutsche Tragödie, p. 340.

<sup>2</sup> Hafner, p. 79.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 87.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 88.







Liebe, zu Tage tritt. Und zwar ist es charakteristischerweise eine umgekehrte Unwissenheit seiner selbst, als sie etwa bei Penthesilea zu Beginn der Dichtung vorliegt: bei ihr die im tiefsten Sinne unpersönliche Gebundenheit an ein objektives Gesetz, das, als heilig, das Ich fordert, während es tatsächlich endlich willkürlich ist und dessen Bestimmung zerstört; --bei dem Prinzen die im tiefsten Sinne unpersönliche Gebundenheit an die zeitliche und willkürliche Subjektivität, an eine nicht objektivistische, sondern subjektivistische Endlichkeit, wie sie schon im Grafen Strahl dargestellt ist. Es sind die beiden Lebenshaltungen, die mit der Religion des Gefühls unmittelbar zusammenstoßen. Die Darstellung dieses subjektivistisch-individualistischen Mißverständnisses des Daseins lag in dem Augenblick nahe, wo die Wirklichkeit aufhörte, ein blindes Spiel des Zufalls zu sein, wo der Wille Gottes und damit die heilige Bestimmung sichtbar wurde.<sup>1</sup>

Obscurity of style is not, however, the most serious defect in much of the modern secondary literature on Prinz Friedrich von Homburg. W. Silz and R. Hinton Thomas, for example, have attacked some of its basic assumptions. "Über das Marionettentheater" has been widely accepted as basic to the understanding of Kleist's life and works, but Silz points out weaknesses in the tract itself, and doubts whether it can be held up as one of Kleist's most positive statements of life. He concludes that "'Das Marionettentheater' is not a reasoned treatise yielding a formula applicable to the whole of Kleist. It is not a major work either of aesthetic theory or of literature. Kleist's greatness lay elsewhere."<sup>2</sup> R.

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<sup>1</sup>Fricke, Gefühl und Schicksal, p. 178.

<sup>2</sup>W. Silz, Heinrich von Kleist (Philadelphia, 1961), p. 85. Because the "Marionettentheater" is used also as a source for Kleist's intention in the Prinz von Homburg, the argument put forth earlier in this thesis, regarding the validity of biography and sources to interpretation, applies here. See above, p. 15.



Hinton Thomas is critical of using musical terms to discuss a work of art:

The impression left by these industrious comparisons is in the main confused and confusing. Phrases like "das musikalische An- und Abschwellen der Stimmen" and talk of "Hauptstimmen . . . die sich kontrastierend wieder vereinigen" illustrate the vague character of many of them, and terms like "Kann- oder ritorellenartige, an die Technik der Fuge erinnernde Figuren," (Blöcker, p. 265) "Benützung der kontrapunktischen Gesetze" und "die Behandlung nach symphonisch-oratorischen Grundsätzen", "die Vorausnahme der Technik Richard Wagners bei Kleist," illustrate the loose eclecticism in the general picture of comparisons of Kleist's work with music.<sup>1</sup>

### 3c. Other Interpretations

The "Education" theory argued for the superiority of the Elector, and was opposed by those which praised the Prince. The question of who changes in the course of the play is taken up again in a simplification of these two types of interpretation. Both the Elector and the Prince are felt to revise their thinking; each coming to an understanding of the other. This theory of "Versöhnung" or reconciliation has led to new and interesting observations about Prinz Friedrich von Homburg, although it is too limiting in itself.

K. Schultze-Jahde traces the actions of the Elector

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<sup>1</sup>R. H. Thomas, "Kleist and the Thorough Bass", Publications of the English Goethe Society, N.S., XXXII (1963), p. 78.







throughout the play, and concludes that most of the difficulties to interpretation are caused by the Elector being "verwirrt" (IV,i; 1175):

An diesem Wörtchen "verwirrt" muß jede Interpretation scheitern, die in dem Kurfürsten einen Despoten auf der einen Seite, einen überlegten, innerlich jeder Situation gewachsenen Erzieher des Prinzen auf der anderen Seite sehen will.<sup>1</sup>

He rejects the theory that the Elector is an educator:

Ich möchte den ganzen Erzieher-Kurfürsten überhaupt fallen lassen: m.E. muß man den Kurfürsten so auffassen, daß er jeden Schritt, den er tut, fest und sicher autoritativ tut, zwischen den einzelnen Schritten aber besteht keine logische Folgerungskausalität, so daß man aus dem Schritt selber den nächsten berechnen könnte.<sup>2</sup>

Because of his mild side, the Elector is not a tyrant, Schultze-Jahde concludes, but neither the Elector nor the Prince resemble what one would expect of Prussian officers. The Prince, Schultze-Jahde admits, is no hero: "Nein wahrlich, dieser verwöhnte Prinz ist kein Führer und Held, nicht einmal ein wirklicher Offizier."<sup>3</sup> The Prince's confusion, especially in Act I, scenes i and v, would support this idea, as well as his pitiful appearance in Act III, scene v. Unfortunately, Schultze-Jahde does not elaborate on this "anti-heroic" aspect of the Prince's character, but decides that

<sup>1</sup>K. Schultze-Jahde, "Zur Interpretation von Kleists Schauspiel Prinz Friedrich von Homburg", Jahrbuch der Kleist-Gesellschaft, IX-X (1927-1928), 112.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 126. The "anti-heroic" character of Prince Friedrich is discussed in Chapter II of this thesis.



insubordination is a major problem of Prinz Friedrich von Homburg:

Die Insubordination wird vielfach als das eigentliche Thema des Stückes angesehen; ebenso aber kann geltend gemacht werden, daß das eigentliche Thema die Charakterzeichnung des Prinzen sei und die Insubordination das Mittel dazu. Beides ist richtig, und gerade das Problem, das in der Insubordination und ihren Folgen aufgeworfen wird, hat Kleist oftmals beschäftigt.<sup>1</sup>

W. Silz points out that all the principal characters in Prinz Friedrich von Homburg show a tendency to err. "With a deeper insight into the involvedness and relativity of things in this imperfect world, Kleist distributes error and responsibility among all the leading persons of his plot."<sup>2</sup> The question of responsibility is important also to Schlagdenhauffen:

Ce raisonnement a tout au faux-fuyant qui confond à souhait la cause et la responsabilité. Comment d'ailleurs en définir les limites exactes? Car, s'il est vrai que Hohenzollern, en appelant l'Electeur au jardin, n'a été qu'une cause lointaine de la faute du Prince, ne faut-il pas en dire autant de l'Electeur qui a agi par curiosité et sans penser à mal? Mais d'autre part, si la responsabilité implique la réflexion antérieure sur les répercussions de nos actes, le Prince lui-même n'est pas responsable-- Si, au contraire on admet la culpabilité du Prince puisqu'il a péché par insouciance, par mépris de la réflexion, l'Electeur qui la veille d'une bataille décisive, s'est livré à des fantaisies dont il n'a pas mesuré les conséquences, est plus coupable que lui; car il n'a pas pour lui l'excuse d'avoir été halluciné. Le problème de la responsabilité tel que Kleist le pose ici demeure inextricable.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Schultze-Jahde, p. 129.

<sup>2</sup>Silz, Heinrich von Kleist, p. 228.

<sup>3</sup>Schlagdenhauffen, p. 6. The question of responsibility is brought up again in Chapter II.







Silz sees a definite change in both the Prince and the Elector which brings about their compromise:

The Prince has been modified by the Elector, but the Elector has also been modified by the Prince. Indeed they go so far to meet each other that they virtually exchange rôles: the Elector resigns his right to severe judgment, the Prince is more severe with himself than the Elector thought of being.<sup>1</sup>

Although he announces the problem of Prinz Friedrich von Homburg as "der Konflikt zwischen der freien Gefühlsentscheidung des Einzelnen und der Ordnung des Gesetzes", Kaiser points out the similarity of the Prince and the Elector, as well as their rivalry.<sup>2</sup> In his analysis of Act III and the "Todesfurchtszene" (III,v), Kaiser shows how the Prince was unconsciously trying to assume the position of the Elector. Although Kaiser has gone considerably beyond the "Reconciliation" theory in discussing the father-son relationship between the Prince and Elector, he fails to show the obvious antagonism of the Elector for the Prince's aspirations. Yet, not relying on the traditional choice offered by the three types of interpretation, Kaiser makes many good observations, and deals with details of the text which have never been commented on before.

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<sup>1</sup>Silz, Heinrich von Kleist, p. 513.

<sup>2</sup>H. Kaiser, "Kleists Prinz von Homburg", Imago, XVI (1930), 119-120.



### Summary

The great majority of interpretations fall into the two defined categories, although they have taken many different forms and have been adopted for many different reasons. Nationalistic prejudices can lead either to the "Education" theory, or to its opposite, for example.

Although the ideas of such critics as Schultze-Jahde, Silz, Schlagdenhauffen, and Kaiser are not completely independent of the above theories, they point beyond a framework in which a choice between the two is necessary. These critics are responsible for the most subtle and interesting interpretative statements yet to appear.

Chapter two of this thesis will continue in this tradition, and is based on the conviction that the work of these four critics is the better for the avoidance of the restrictions resulting from the acceptance of the framework referred to.





## CHAPTER TWO

### AN EXAMINATION OF THE MILITARY AND PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS OF THE CHARACTERS IN PRINZ FRIEDRICH VON HOMBURG

In Prinz Friedrich von Homburg, two levels of relationships, the military and official on the one hand, and the familial (or personal) on the other, are sometimes kept apart artificially, and sometimes hopelessly confused. The name "Ramin", for example, is a motif which is linked both to the military and personal sphere. In Act I, scene iv, Hohenzollern mentions this name four times as a suggestion for the lady of the Prince's dream. "Ramin" is also the name of the military officer who is put in charge of escorting Natalie and the Electress to a safe place during the battle. "Ramin", like Natalie's glove, is a subtle, yet ironical link between Homburg's military and personal ambitions. In Act I, scene v, the Elector mentions "Ramin" just as the Field Marshal is calling out the Prince's orders, thus allowing the personal and familial to interfere when the Prince should be trying to concentrate on the military.

Günter Blöcker, in his discussion of Act I, scene v, mentions briefly the fact that two separate activities co-exist:

Das Hauptthema (die Ausgabe des Schlachtplans) liegt bei dem Feldmarschall Dörfling. Ihm sekundieren die



Offiziere mit knappen Hier-Meldungen und routinemäßigem Wiederholen der Order. Daneben entfaltet sich als lyrisches Seitenthema das kurfürstliche Familienidyll mit Frühstück, Aufbruch, Abschied und dem Suchen nach dem verlorenen Handschuh.<sup>1</sup>

Blöcker does not elaborate much further on his important observations, nor does Samuel, who makes a similar point:

In der Paroleszene (5. Auftritt) sind zwei Handlungen miteinander verwoben, die Staatshandlung und die persönliche. Dementsprechend sind zwei verschiedene Gruppen auf zwei Seiten der Bühne verteilt: Die Gruppe um die Kurfürstin, die sich verabschiedet, und die um Dörfling, der die Befehle für die Schlacht austellt. Der Kurfürst geht von einer zur anderen und einmal überquert auch Homburg die Teilungslinie. Der Handschuh ist das verwirrende Element, das die beiden Handlungen und Gruppen in Bewegung bringt und die Szene in kleine, dramatisch höchst wirksame Handlungsfragmente von oft ausgesprochener Komik zerschneidet.<sup>2</sup>

The confusion of the two levels of activity is obtrusive in Act I, scene v, but permeates the entire play as well. The following subsections of this chapter will examine the roles of all the characters of Prinz Friedrich von Homburg in the light of this fact.

### 1. The Army

The army, which one would expect to be the model of efficiency and obedience in the Brandenburg state, is composed

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<sup>1</sup>Blöcker, p. 267.

<sup>2</sup>Samuel, 1964 ed., pp. 179-180.





of many unmilitary individuals. We are first given insight into its ambivalent character in Act I, scene v, where all the army officers are gathered together with the exception of Kottwitz. Field Marshal Dörfling, "a well-meaning simpleton, timid, helpless in critical situations, certainly the very opposite of the historical figure whose name he bears"<sup>1</sup>, tries to give an air of efficiency. His attempts are hindered by the interruption of the ladies and the Elector. Both Truchß and Hennings, who are colonels of the infantry, get their orders very quickly. The Prince of Homburg has one of the highest ranks, the longest orders, and the least to do. Intent on finding the owner of the lost glove, he is unable to grasp his orders. Like Dörfling, who is particularly confused in Act V, scene iii, the Prince's position is directly in contrast to his capabilities. Both men appear as ineffectual cogs early in the play and we are forced to ask the question why they are given the highest positions in the army.

The confusion in the army is further exemplified in the futile attempt to inform the Prince of his orders. Aware that Homburg is not paying attention, and in the hope that someone in the Prince's company will comprehend the orders, Dörfling asks whether Kottwitz is present. Golz, however, reveals that he has been sent by Kottwitz and takes down

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<sup>1</sup>Samuel, 1962 ed., p. 55.



the Prince's orders. From the stage directions describing Dörfling four times by "/:er hält inne:/", it is evident that the Field Marshal rapidly loses patience with the Prince. He realizes that Homburg has only retained the phrase, "Dann wird er die Fanfare blasen lassen."<sup>1</sup> When raising his voice does not seem to jolt the Prince from his trance, Dörfling tells Golz that he wishes to speak to Kottwitz before the battle:

Den Obrist Kottwitz, merkt das Baron Golz,  
Wünsch' ich, wenn er es möglich machen kann,  
Noch vor Beginn des Treffens selbst zu sprechen.

(I.v.340-342)

Presumably Dörfling wishes to get the orders to the Prince through indirect means or to ensure that someone will be sufficiently informed to carry them out. Golz understands that the reason for the message is the Prince's distraction, and promises the Field Marshal: "Bestellen werd' ich es. Verlaß' Dich drauf." (I.v.343) Although Golz informs Kottwitz that Dörfling wishes to see him before the battle and tells him the Prince's orders, Dörfling and Kottwitz do not communicate before the battle. Thus Kottwitz is not warned of the Prince's condition:

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<sup>1</sup>In V.v, Dörfling recounts the Prince's behaviour:

Der Prinz, erinnr' ich mich, von meiner Rede  
Vernahm kein Wort; zerstreut sah ich ihn oft,  
Jedoch in solchem Grad abwesend ganz  
Aus seiner Brust, noch nie, als diesen Tag.

(1702-1705)





Da Kottwitz den Feldmarschall nicht gefunden hat, ist er von den Vorfällen während der Paroleszene, besonders von Homburgs Zerstreuung, nicht unterrichtet. Allerdings kennt er den Schlachtplan, den ihm Golz zu berichten hatte (Vgl. 279 ff.).<sup>1</sup>

Either Hohenzollern or Golz could have informed Kottwitz that the "General der Reuterei" has been behaving abnormally.<sup>2</sup> Both men were present in the garden-scene and heard the spoken orders in Act I, scene v. The reason why neither Golz nor Hohenzollern inform Kottwitz is a matter for speculation. Perhaps they do not wish to implicate themselves in a plot against the Prince, or they do not want to commit an act of insubordination by doing something which is necessary, but unprovided for, in the military code of the Elector. In any case, Golz is particularly reluctant to forget his rank to inform Kottwitz.

It seems that the army is hindered in its efficiency not only by inferior officers, but by red tape. Kottwitz is never informed of the Prince's distraction. If he were, he might have felt it his duty to take over command of the cavalry. As Act II, scene i, shows, Kottwitz is not even given the opportunity to observe the Prince's derangement for himself.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Samuel, 1964 ed; p. 183 on line 390.

<sup>2</sup>Perhaps this is, however, the Prince's normal behaviour-- in any case, it is still questionable what he is doing in such a high position.

<sup>3</sup>Hohenzollern diverts his attention. See below p.59.



The comic aspects of Act II, scene i, are obtrusive, and the character of the army is further revealed by the introduction of Kottwitz. Both the Elector and the Prince respect Kottwitz as an important military figure, yet his behaviour is quite un-military at times. Kottwitz' praise of the beauty of the morning is rather like Shakespeare's "Queen Mab" speech in Romeo and Juliet. It seems out of keeping with what one would expect of a military role. However, it does characterize Kottwitz as a man who has a place for emotions. If anyone would have understood the Prince's situation, it would have been he.

In fact, in emotional situations, Kottwitz behaves much like the Prince. He participates enthusiastically in the battle charge.<sup>1</sup> (II.x.478-482) He is also moved momentarily by the Prince's nationalistic outburst. (V.vii.1763) In his lengthy argument with the Elector (V.i), Kottwitz assures him that the Prince, being a good tactician, knew what he was doing when he charged prematurely. Yet this is contradicted by the Prince's behaviour prior to, and during the battle.

Kottwitz is, however, sincere in his desire to obey orders, and is hampered by the failure of the others to inform him of every aspect of the situation. Although the conversation between Golz, Hohenzollern and Kottwitz comes

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Silz, Heinrich von Kleist, p. 230.





to the subject of the Prince, none of these men discuss the orders just given, the ensuing battle, or the condition of the Prince.

The failure of the various military officials of high or low rank to relay information accurately points to the fact that it is not just Prince Friedrich von Homburg who is inefficient. The incident of the Prince's fall, mentioned casually in Act II, scene ii, comes up again in Act II, scene ix, when Truchß informs the Elector that the Prince was so severely injured just prior to the battle, that he could not have led the cavalry. Either Truchß is trying to protect the Prince or he has been misled through the questionable medium of word of mouth communication, for this rumour is proved false immediately by the surprise arrival of the Prince with his victory flags.

Dörfling, who warns the Elector in Act V, scene iii, that the army is on the verge of revolt, has received his information from a very dubious source. It is no wonder that the Elector is suspicious of it:

Feldmarschall.

Wer mir das sagte?  
Die Dame Retzow, der Du trauen kannst,  
Die Base meiner Frau! Sie war heut Abend,  
In ihres Ohms, des Drost von Retzow, Haus,  
Wo Offiziere, die vom Lager kamen,  
Laut diesen dreisten Anschlag äußerten.

(V.iii.1448-1454)

Above all, one is impressed by the obstrusiveness of personalities in the army. Its members are loyal to each



other, and side against the Elector, although in military terms, his arguments are the most logical. The army is unanimous in supporting the Prince, whose cause is primarily an emotional one. That is, Dörfling suggests, what attracts the army to Homburg:

Jedwedes Heer liebt, weißt Du, seinen Helden,  
Laß diesen Funken nicht, der es durchglüht,  
Ein heillos fressend Feuer um sich greifen.

(V.iii.1460-1462)

## 2. Natalie

Although many critics have considered the Prince a wronged man, an idealistic reformer, or "a dashing, young and overweening officer who is carried away by the din of battle"<sup>1</sup>, no critic has commented on the fact that he may be mentally sick. Only the female characters suggest that he needs remedial treatment. Hohenzollern and the Elector continue to force on him the responsibility of an ordinary, normal individual. Both Natalie and the Electress attest that Homburg is sick and the Electress cannot condone making fun of a person who is emotionally disturbed:

Die Kurfürstin.

Der junge Mann ist krank, so wahr ich lebe.

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<sup>1</sup>Samuel, 1962 ed; p. 39.





Prinzessin Natalie.

Er braucht des Arztes --!

Die Kurfürstin.

Man sollt' ihm helfen, dünkt mich,  
Nicht den Moment verbringen, sein zu spotten!

(I.i.32-35)

Although Hohenzollern scoffs at this observation and the Elector cannot believe his eyes, the Prince's behaviour in the entire scene is not what one would expect of a normal person.

Both Natalie and the Electress are concerned mostly for the welfare of the men they love. In Act II, scene 4, they lament the Elector's apparent death, while the Prince concerns himself more with acquiring a detailed report of what happened. When the Electress admits in the "Todesfurchtszene" (III.v), that she is unable to dissuade her husband from his plan of action, Natalie decides to plead Homburg's cause. That is, they operate on a personal level.

In the light of the Elector's attitude to her, Natalie's actions border on treason.<sup>1</sup> She uses her military power as "Chef eines Dragonerregiments", and her influence with the Elector to save her fiancé, the Prince of Homburg.

As early as Act I, scene v, the Elector shows parental concern for Natalie, but perhaps more than parental interest. Like the Prince, Natalie is an orphan who relies on the Elector for support. She does not, however, understand the

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Silz, Heinrich von Kleist, pp. 129-130.



reasons for his special concessions to her, nor does she completely trust her adopted father. Natalie's utterances; "Und Gott schuf noch nichts Milderer, als Dich"; " . . . --O seine Milde/Ist uferlos, ich wußt' es, wie die See"; and "O seine Großmuth, Freund, ist ohne Grenzen";<sup>1</sup> are often quoted as adequate appraisals of the Elector's character. The context of all three is, nevertheless, similarly ironical. In all three instances Natalie is intent on persuasion. In the first case she desires Homburg's pardon which the Elector will allow on conditions which she cannot accept. That is, Homburg must die to be a hero. In the last two quotations, Natalie desires to conceal from Homburg the Elector's humiliating terms for living. To be honourable, the Prince can only choose to die.

Thus in Act IV, scene i, Natalie sees through the ambiguous wording of the Elector's letter and accepts his tentative pardon with reservation:

Natalie.  
/:nach einer Pause:/

Was Deine Huld, O Herr, so rasch erweckt,  
Ich weiß es nicht und untersuch' es nicht.  
Das aber, sieh, das fühl' ich in der Brust,  
Unedel meiner spotten wirst Du nicht:  
Der Brief enthalte, was es immer sei,  
Ich glaube Rettung -- und ich danke Dir!

(IV.i.1200-1205)

Natalie's mistrust of the Elector and love for Homburg lead her to take matters into her own hands. In Act IV, scene

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<sup>1</sup>IV.i.1111; IV.iv.1320; IV.iv.1345.





ii, she has the letter which supposedly contains the Prince's pardon, and therefore does not have to sign Kottwitz' petition:

Natalie.

Der Prinz zwar, hör' ich, soll, mein edler Vetter,  
Vom Herrn aus eignem Trieb, begnadigt werden,  
Und eines solchen Schritts bedarf es nicht.

(IV.ii.1228-1230)

Nevertheless, after questioning Reuß further, Natalie signs in order to give Homburg's cause even more support:

Gleichwohl will ich unter einem Blatte,  
Das, in des Herrn Entscheidung, klug gebraucht,  
Als ein Gewicht kann in die Waage fallen,  
Das ihm vielleicht, den Ausschlag einzuleiten,  
Sogar willkommen ist, mich nicht verweigern--

(IV.ii.1231-1235)

That she will do something even more daring is soon made evident. If Natalie had left matters at this, she would not be guilty of too serious a crime. However, she is too emotionally involved in the situation not to act dramatically. Upon hearing that Kottwitz is unable to communicate with the rest of the army because he is stationed in Arnstein, she issues orders that he bring his regiment to Fehrbellin on the pretext that the Elector told her to do so because of a lack of stabling facilities there:

Zum Glück trug mir der Kurfürst, fällt mir ein,  
Bedrängt von anderen Geschäften, auf,  
An Kottwitz, dem die Stallung dort zu eng,  
Zum Marsch hierher die Ordre zu erlassen!

(IV.iv.1265-1268)

Her reasons may be convincing to Reuß, but the fact that Natalie insists that the orders originated from the Elector



gives them added authority and ensures that Kottwitz will obey them.

That she tells Reuß to await her orders before delivering her letter to Kottwitz, shows that Natalie is cautious enough to wait for the outcome of her visit to Homburg, but desperate enough to resort to subterfuge if necessary to save the man she loves. Even though Natalie uses every form of persuasion, the Prince does not pardon himself. (IV.iv.) Pretending to sanction his decision, she is, nevertheless, resolved to do everything in her power to save her fiancé: "--Inzwischen, wenn Du Deinem Herzen folgst,/Ist's mir erlaubt, dem meinigen zu folgen." (IV.iv.1389-1390) When she sends Reuß off to Arnstein with the letter to bring Kottwitz to Fehrbellin, (which causes the Elector considerable embarrassment), Natalie puts the responsibility of the orders onto the Elector:

Auf, mit eurem Brief,  
Nach Arnstein hin, zum Obersten von Kottwitz!  
Das Regiment bricht auf, der Herr befiehlt's;  
Hier, noch vor Mitternacht, erwart' ich es!

(IV.iv.1391-1394)

From his complete astonishment at Kottwitz' arrival in Fehrbellin, it is apparent that the Elector meant this officer to stay in Arnstein. By cross-examining Kottwitz, the Elector finds out that it is not on account of a rebellion, but because of Natalie that Kottwitz has seemingly disobeyed orders. It is interesting that the Elector pretends to know all about Kottwitz' orders and thus protects Natalie.







She is not upbraided for her actions and her insubordination is not successful in changing the Prince's decision to die. Homburg vindicates the Elector's first verdict-- that he is guilty of insubordination. Natalie's agony at the Prince's behaviour (V.viii) is proof that she is not impressed by his decision to die, and that she was right to mistrust the Elector who in Act V, scene xi, once more tricks the Prince.

### 3. Hohenzollern

Samuel says that Hohenzollern is the most enigmatic character in Prinz Friedrich von Homburg:

He is Homburg's friend, knows his physical weaknesses and his mental instability, and yet exposes him to the ridicule of the Court, and almost becomes his evil genius when he guides him in a wrong direction and thereby indirectly causes his breakdown. He is the realist foil to the youthful idealist and does not really understand his friend. Yet, there is an air of superiority about him, and he is the only person in the play who knows all the ramifications of the complex situation. He has something of the cynic, even of Mephistopheles, yet towards the end he springs to Homburg's defence and with bold humor accuses his ruler and commander-in-chief of being the guilty person.<sup>1</sup>

Whether or not Hohenzollern's behaviour is more problematic than that of the Elector, Samuel's discussion is one of the few that have mentioned this character at all.

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<sup>1</sup>Samuel, 1962 ed; p. 55.



Hohenzollern's attitude to the military is very much like that of the Elector; he favours adherence to the law. He is aware, however, that the Prince is a dreamer, but does nothing about it. Like the Elector, Hohenzollern enjoys playing with the Prince's emotions, although he does not do it maliciously.

Hohenzollern's behaviour is problematic. A member of the Elector's suite, he appears seldom with the Elector. Always giving the air of knowing more than he does, in the one scene where the Elector desires information, Hohenzollern says he knows nothing:

Der Kurfürst.

Nun? --Wollt ihr mir, ihr Herrn, dies Räthsel lösen?  
-- Wer rief ihn [Kottwitz] her?

Hohenzollern.

Das weiß ich nicht, mein Kurfürst.

(V.1.1398-1399)

Truchß, Golz, and Hohenzollern go to find out what is happening. The next time Hohenzollern appears, however, (V.v) he defends the Prince and accuses the Elector.

Hohenzollern's role seems to be that of an intermediary between the Prince and the other characters. Homburg acknowledges Hohenzollern as his friend, confides in him and calls him by his first name. Yet Hohenzollern unwittingly exposes the unmilitary and anti-heroic side of the Prince. In Act I, scene i, for example, his actions are contradictory. On the one hand he seems to be trying to excuse Homburg's behaviour







as being nothing extraordinary, yet on the other hand, he does not hide his disapproval of, nor his concern for, the Prince's failing his military duty.

Although Homburg's outward appearance is anything but exemplary for a military officer, Hohenzollern goes to great lengths to convince the Elector that the Prince is in contact with his military role. It is the Laurel wreath, the symbol of the victor in ancient Greece, that the Prince is weaving as he dreams of victory in the forthcoming battle:

Hohenzollern.

O -- was! Die Schlacht von morgen, mein Gebieter!  
Sterngucker sieht er, wett' ich, schon im Geist,  
Aus Sonnen einen Siegeskranz ihm winden.

(I.i.56-58)

Hohenzollern goes on to compare the Prince and the wreath to a vain young girl trying on a floral hat. He further implies that Homburg does not know what to do with the victor's wreath, and refers to him in an increasingly derogatory manner. The Prince is, at first, "unser tapfrer Vetter", the leader of the cavalry, and the "hero" who is found sleepwalking. Then he is called a "fool" and a "madman", as Hohenzollern condemns the Prince's strong reaction to the stimulus of the presence of those he loves.

By exposing Homburg so mercilessly to the royal party, Hohenzollern reveals a complete lack of understanding of what is wrong with the Prince. He treats the whole event as a joke, and scoffs at any suggestion that Homburg is a sick man.<sup>1</sup> It

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<sup>1</sup>See above, pp. 48-49.



is evident, however, that Hohenzollern has seen the Prince in a distracted condition before. He tells the Hofcavalier that Homburg will be unaffected by the light from the torches (I.1. 42-45), and knows that if anyone calls the Prince by name (that is, "Arthur"), he will collapse.

Like the Elector, Hohenzollern is curious to watch the reactions of the Prince, and his joke backfires. (I.4) The Elector sent his page to remind Hohenzollern to keep the event in the garden a secret from Homburg. (I.3) However, Hohenzollern finds the Prince's attempts to adjust to reality so amusing that he defeats his own purpose. By asking Homburg how he came to be in the garden, Hohenzollern gives him the incentive to recall the dream. When this happens Hohenzollern tries to divert the Prince from it, only enhancing his desire to reconstruct it.

Homburg's behaviour in Act I, scene iv, is pathetic, especially for a General in the Brandenburg army. Hohenzollern treats him not as a man, but as a child and a fool. When it dawns on Homburg, for example, that he should be out leading the cavalry, he scrambles madly for his armour: "Rasch! Meinen Helm! Die Rüstung!" To which Hohenzollern, making no effort to help him, casually replies, "Ja wo sind sie?" and the sequence continues, with Homburg completely at the mercy of his friend. (I.iv.101ff.)

Although Hohenzollern tries to impress upon the Prince the importance of his military role, he cannot laugh away the







presence of the lady's glove, which seems to be better explained by Homburg's dream than Hohenzollern's more objective suggestions:

. . . Meinthalben sei's die Platen,  
Sei's die Ramin! Am Sonntag geht die Post nach Preußen,  
Da kannst Du auf dem kürzsten Weg' erfahren,  
Ob Deiner Schönen dieser Handschuh fehlt. --

(I.iv.200-204)

Thus instead of explaining to the Prince what really happened in the garden, Hohenzollern allows him to go on being misled. Ignoring a problem never solves it, and the Prince has already attached so much significance to the dream that he can think of nothing else. Just when Hohenzollern believes he has diverted the Prince, Homburg brings up "die liebliche Prinzessin von Oranien." (I.iv.208) Although the Prince's reference to Natalie is in a military context, we know that she is still very important to his personal world as well.

In Act I, scene v, to Homburg's amazement, Hohenzollern seems to have missed the significance of the glove:

Hohenzollern  
/:unwillig:/

Nun! Was giebt's? Was hast Du vor?

Der Prinz von Homburg.

Was! Sah'st Du nichts?

Hohenzollern.

Nein, nichts! Sei still, zum Henker!

(I.v.326-328)

Our suspicions that Hohenzollern is indeed aware of what is



happening, are confirmed by Hohenzollern himself in Act V. In a sense Hohenzollern's detached attitude in Act I, scene v, is an attempt to divert the Prince from his preoccupation with the glove. On the other hand, Hohenzollern would be in an embarrassing situation if the Elector should become aware of the effect of the glove on the Prince. If the Elector were to link Homburg's distraction to the unfortunate incident of Act I, scene i, (in which both the Elector and Hohenzollern were implicated) Hohenzollern could be blamed for not keeping the incident from the Prince as the Elector had commanded.<sup>1</sup> Hohenzollern's guilt for his part in exposing Homburg to the mockery of the court explains, therefore, his reluctance to prompt the Prince. Yet the only one who can divert Homburg from his personal preoccupation is Hohenzollern, because he is the only one fully aware of what is on the Prince's mind. When the Prince does not respond to his title, "Der Prinz von Homburg", in answer to the Field Marshal, Hohenzollern gets his attention by whispering "Arthur". Thus the activity involving the military is as foreign to the Prince as his title.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The page told Hohenzollern the Elector's orders:

Der Kurfürst schickt mich her!  
 Dem Prinzen mögtet Ihr, wenn er erwacht,  
 Kein Wort, befiehlt er, von dem Scherz entdecken,  
 Den er sich eben jetzt mit ihm erlaubt!

(I.3.81-84)

<sup>2</sup>Although the Prince's name is "Friedrich Arthur", he







In Act II, scene i, as in Act I, scene 1, Hohenzollern tries to account for an absence of "Arthur" without revealing his incompetence or referring to the dream-incident. While covering up for the Prince, Hohenzollern only makes things worse for him. Like Golz, Hohenzollern becomes an accomplice in the failure to inform Kottwitz of the Prince's condition. When Kottwitz asks, "Wo ist des Prinzen, unsers Führers, Durchlaucht?" (II.i.374), Hohenzollern evades the question by assuring him that Homburg will return presently. When an officer mentions that he heard that the Prince has fallen from his horse, Hohenzollern tries to cover up this unheroic incident by insisting that the Prince was not hurt, and therefore the whole thing is not worth worrying about. Upon the Prince's arrival, Hohenzollern manages to bring out the fact that by being in the chapel, the Prince was attending to military duty. Kottwitz is impressed by this and therefore does not link it up with the Prince's incompetence:

Ein frommer junger Herr, das muß ich sagen!  
 Das Werk, glaubt mir, das mit Gebet beginnt  
 Das wird mit Heil und Ruhm und Sieg sich krönen!

(II.ii.413-415)

Homburg has no excuse for not knowing his orders. Just prior to the battle, Hohenzollern repeats them once more.

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is most commonly referred to as "the Prince of Homburg". No one ever refers to him as "Friedrich" which is the Elector's name as well. Only Hohenzollern refers to the Prince as "Arthur". This name seems to be the key to bringing Homburg back to reality. Cf. Samuel, 1964 ed., p. 177, on line 87: "Er [der Vornahme 'Arthur'] deutet die gespaltene Persönlichkeit Homburgs an."



(II.ii.422-428) In contrast to the Prince, Kottwitz, Hohenzollern and the others are able to follow the action of the battle. Hohenzollern's enthusiasm seems to spur on the Prince's desire to attack:

Ha! Wie das Feld die wieder räumen wird,  
Wenn sie versteckt uns hier im Thal erblickt!

.....  
Schießt! Schieß! Und macht den Schooß der Erde bersten!  
Der Riß soll eurer Leichen Grabmal sein!

(II.ii.455-456.461-462)

Several critics have pointed out that Homburg's treatment of the officer (II.ii.486ff) is similar to his own arrest (II.x.750ff). Hohenzollern's behaviour is also similar in the two scenes. In Act II, scene ii, he supports the Prince's decision to courtmartial the soldier of inferior rank for speaking his mind. "Hohenzollern. /:zu dem Offizier:/ 'Schweig! Bist Du rasend?'" (II.ii.490) Yet Hohenzollern reminds Homburg that the officer was only giving some advice: "Es war ein Rath nur, den man Dir ertheilt." (II.ii.495) When the Prince is taken prisoner in Act II, scene x, Kottwitz and Dörfling are shocked by the Elector's action. Hohenzollern, as well as Golz, accepts his verdict and reminds the Prince that orders were not to attack without permission:

-- Du hast zu zeitig, wie wir gleich gesagt,  
Dich in die Schlacht gedrängt; die Ordre war,  
Nicht von dem Platz zu weichen, ungerufen!

(II.x.769-771)

Hohenzollern also becomes angry when Homburg protests his arrest:







Der Prinz von Homburg.

Sind denn die Märkischen geschlagen worden?

Hohenzollern.

/:stampft mit dem Fuß auf die Erde:/

Gleichviel! Der Satzung soll Gehorsam sein.

(II.x.773-774)

Hohenzollern is careful not to commit himself in the presence of the Elector. His concern and sympathy for the Prince is brought out, however, in Act III, scene i. Because of his reliance on his feelings about the Elector, Homburg's appraisal of his situation is out of contact with reality. Hohenzollern, on the other hand, is aware of the Elector's desire to sign Homburg's death warrant and finally succeeds in convincing the Prince of this fact. However, by relating the Elector's motivation to his military ambitions only, that is, his desire to marry Natalie to the King of Sweden to put an end to the war, Hohenzollern fails to see a possible more personal motivation. Homburg's engagement to Natalie makes him the Elector's rival for Natalie's love.<sup>1</sup>

Hohenzollern's petition to the Elector in Act V, scene v, is a real "coup de théâtre". To the surprise of all, he pleads the Prince's case in writing and explains how his disobedience is directly related to the scene in the garden and the glove. By placing all the blame on the

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<sup>1</sup>This very important point is first discussed by Kaiser and is commented upon more fully in the next two sections of this thesis.



Elector, Hohenzollern exposes his own guilt; it was he who aroused the Elector's curiosity about the Prince's condition in the first place. The Elector had, however, completely forgotten the incident of Act I, scene i, and was not even conscious that the glove which he found in Act I, scene v, had any significance for the Prince. Neither Hohenzollern nor the Elector wished the practical joke in the garden to be made known to the Prince. The Elector was unaware that Homburg had not forgotten the incident; Hohenzollern saw the consequences and tried unsuccessfully to cover up his guilt. They are both, therefore, guilty of failing their responsibility to a fellow human being. As head of the state, the Elector is responsible for his officers. When seeing the Prince in a distracted state in the garden, he could have removed him from his command. Hohenzollern's claim to importance is in his being a member of the Elector's suite, so the Elector is responsible for his problematic behaviour. Hohenzollern is not an asset to the Elector. He should have reminded the Elector before Act V, that the Prince cannot be held responsible for himself.

#### 4. The Elector

Because it is difficult to assign motives to the Elector's behaviour, his treatment of the Prince has been





seen as entirely benevolent, entirely tyrannical, or a combination of both. Trying to plan his every move beforehand, the Elector is often forced by the swiftness of events to act on the spur of the moment. The Elector's attempts to be objective are thwarted by his emotional involvement with Natalie and Homburg-- both orphaned relatives with military authority. Ironically, Natalie, upon whom the Elector bestows his favour, deliberately betrays him because of her love for Homburg; the Prince, whom the Elector condemns, is unwilling to reject his trust in his sovereign.

Although there are many suggestions in the play that the Elector is educating the Prince, until Act V, scene xii, the Elector's attitude to the Prince does not support them. The relationship of the two is developed subtly and emerges more that of a father and son, rather than that of a teacher and student.

Up to Act II, scene ix, the Elector has either ignored or misunderstood his cousin's feelings and ideals. It is almost unbelievable to the Elector that the Prince is sleepwalking in the garden. In spite of the fact that the Prince is supposedly engrossed in military thoughts, the Elector's amazement is mixed with a certain disdain: "Seltsam beim Himmel! Doch, was gilt's, ich weiß,/ Was dieses jungen Thoren Brust bewegt?" (I.i.54-55) The Elector's curiosity leads him to play the joke on the Prince. That the Elector does not realize the seriousness of the situation is shown



in his being quick to forget about it.

Greatly distressed by the glove, which seems to confirm his dream as reality, the Prince is confused even more by the Elector in Act I, scene v. While the Elector is fussing about an escort for the ladies and chatting with them over breakfast, Dörfling is attempting to dictate orders. Hence two realms of activity are not kept separate and utter confusion results. The presence of the ladies interrupts the dictation of the battle orders and disturbs the Prince. The Elector is not aware of this. He draws Natalie's attention to the glove at Homburg's feet, but does not realize that the Prince is anything but calm at proving that it belongs to her. After escorting the ladies from the stage, the Elector returns to the military scene and ironically advises Homburg to control himself:

Herr Prinz von Homburg, Dir empfehl' ich Ruhe!  
 Du hast am Ufer, weißt Du, mir des Rheins  
 Zwei Siege jüngst verscherzt; regier' Dich wohl,  
 Und laß mich heut den dritten nicht entbehren,  
 Der Mindres nicht, als Thron und Reich, mir gilt!

(I.v.348-352)

By stressing how important the battle is, the Elector places more responsibility on the Prince. As in Act I, scene i, (74-77) the Elector seems to be challenging the Prince to prove himself. Yet the Elector has contributed to the Prince's distraught state of mind and given him negative orders. Homburg is not to move from the position assigned to him until Hennings and Truchß have virtually defeated the enemy.







From Mörner and Sparren, we hear of the Elector's part in the Battle of Fehrbellin, as well as what happened after the Prince attacked. The Prince's first onslaught was beaten down by enemy fire and he was forced to reassemble his cavalry force. Thus his premature attack was unsuccessful. The Elector, meanwhile, according to Mörner, was riding in a very heroic manner along with Truchß and the main attacking body: "Auf einem Schimmel herrlich saß er da,/ Im Sonnenstrahl, die Bahn des Siegs erleuchtend." (II.v.540-541) Suddenly horse and rider sank to the dust. It was then that the Prince led his successful attack, and, had the Swedes been cut off from the bridgehead on the Rhine, none of Wrangel's men would have survived, or as Mörner puts it:

Und hätte nicht der Brückenkopf am Rhyn  
Im Würgen uns gehemmt, so wäre keiner,  
Der an dem Heerd der Väter, sagen könnte:  
Bei Fehrbellin sah ich den Helden<sup>1</sup> fallen!

(II.v.559-562)

Sparren's news sheds a different light on this first commentary. The Elector's part in the battle is less glorious with his survival. It is not the Elector who died a hero, but Froben, his groom. The Elector's appearance in the battle resembles, in some respects, that of the Prince. Both were deaf to the warnings of others; both were after personal fame and glory:

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<sup>1</sup>This ironically refers to the Elector, who does not die in the battle, and does not come out a hero.



Der Landesherr, der, jeder Warnung taub,  
 Den Schimmel wieder ritt, den strahlendweißen,  
 Den Froben jüngst in England ihm erstand,  
 War wieder, wie bis heut noch stets geschah,  
 Das Ziel der feindlichen Kanonenkugeln.

(II.viii.641-645)

Had not Froben exchanged horses with him, the Elector would most certainly have been killed for his rashness. Thus the only person to be recognized as a hero by everyone is Froben, who is not alive to enjoy his honour.

The Elector's first appearance after his brush with death has perplexed many critics. We do not expect him to court-martial the leader of the cavalry, whom we know to be the Prince:

Wer immer auch die Reuterei geführt,  
 Am Tag der Schlacht, und, eh der Obrist Hennings  
 Des Feindes Brücken hat zerstören können,  
 Damit ist aufgebrochen, eigenmächtig,  
 Zur Flucht, bevor ich Ordre gab, ihn zwingend,  
 Der ist des Todes schuldig, das erklär' ich,  
 Und vor ein Kriegsgericht bestell' ich ihn.  
 -- Der Prinz von Homburg hat sie nicht geführt?

(II.ix.715-722)

The "Education" theory has difficulty showing the Elector benevolent in this scene. Declaring him completely tyrannical cannot explain his behaviour later in the play. One must, however, compare the positions of the Elector and the Prince after the battle.

The Elector had planned his strategy very carefully, and therefore desired that the battle be won strictly according to his formulations. Although the Prince has a very high rank, tactically, if he had followed the Elector's orders, he







would have contributed to victory after it had been won. The Prince's over-hasty charge upset the Elector's military plans as well as his ego. The Prince led his successful attack only after seeing that the Elector had fallen, and thus came to his aid. (II.vi.550-562) Having warned the Prince not to cause him to forfeit a third battle, the Elector surely did not anticipate the Prince winning it. In previous scenes, the Elector showed that he was not impressed by the Prince,<sup>1</sup> yet Homburg proves in the Battle of Fehrbellin that he is capable of brave, heroic action.

The success of a "fool", like the Prince,<sup>2</sup> especially when he had disobeyed orders, must be very disconcerting to the Elector. The Prince is also a potential heir to the Elector's throne<sup>3</sup>, and a bigger hero than his sovereign in the battle. The Elector was humiliated, for Froben took away his glory by pointing out the folly of his behaviour and dying for him.

<sup>1</sup>I.i.54-55; I.i.74-77; I.v.348-352.

<sup>2</sup>I.i.54-55.

<sup>3</sup>The Prince is quick to assume responsibility at the apparent death of the Elector. In Act II, scene vi, Homburg not only promises Natalie to become her support in place of the Elector, but to free the Mark of its enemies:

Ich, Fräulein, übernehme eure Sache!  
 Ein Engel will ich, mit dem Flammenschwerdt,  
 An eures Throns verwais'te Stufen stehn!  
 Der Kurfürst wollte, eh das Jahr noch wechselt,  
 Befreit die Marken sehn; wohlan! ich will der  
 Vollstrecker solchen letzten Willens sein!



The Elector's desire to punish the leader of the cavalry, whoever he may be, is an attempt to punish the one who stole his personal glory. Although Truchß suggests that the Prince was wounded and did not lead the charge, the Elector is well aware that his cousin is the most likely candidate to have done so. When the Prince arrives carrying victory flags, the Elector is shocked, not only because Homburg is unharmed, but because the impact of their rivalry comes home. The Elector's seemingly irrational behaviour in Act II, scenes ix and x, is therefore an expression of his resentment for the Prince's intrusion into his sphere of authority. It is prepared for in Act II, scene viii, where the Prince, to Sparren's astonishment, reveals that he has not been informed as to the outcome of the battle, nor of the fact that the Elector has gone to Berlin to negotiate terms for peace. (686ff)

Although he can justify the Prince's arrest by arguing that obedience to the law is fundamental to a military state, the Elector cannot hide the personal wound the Prince's disobedience has caused him. The Elector's dissatisfaction is not so much with the outcome of the Battle of Fehrbellin, but with the way it was won. (II.ix.729-737) He is obsessed with fighting more battles as soon as possible to prove to himself that it is not through chance, but through planning, that one wins victories. Homburg is acknowledged the technical victor of Fehrbellin, yet accused of preventing an even







greater victory; that is, the hypothetical victory which the Elector, (to save his own pride), insists could have been won, if his instructions had been followed.

Because of the Elector's love for Natalie, his rivalry with the Prince is not limited only to the military. In every scene where they appear together, the Elector treats Natalie with a great deal of affection. In Act I, scene v, for example, he refers to her as "mein süßes Mädchen", "mein Töchterchen", and "Kind". Such expressions of endearment are found profusely in Act IV, scene i, where Natalie appeals to the Elector's emotions. She tells him that she is not pleading for Homburg's life because she wants him for herself, and genuinely shocks the Elector with the news that the Prince is begging for mercy. If the Prince has really fallen so low, and given up his military position, he is no longer a threat to the Elector. Thus the Elector makes the concession: "Wenn er [Homburg] den Spruch für ungerecht kann halten/ Cassir' ich die Artikel: er ist frei." (IV.i.1185-1186) Yet Natalie's favour is important to the Elector, as it is to the Prince. He does not conceal the fact that his love for his "daughter" influenced his change of attitude to Homburg:

Der Kurfürst.

So kann er, [Homburg] für sein Leben, gleich Dir danken.

/:er umarmt sie:/

Mein liebes Kind! Bist Du mir wieder gut?

(IV.i.1198-1199)



In spite of his concession to Natalie, the Elector is shrewd enough to protect himself by the wording of Homburg's pardon. The Prince has really not much choice at all. He never denied that he is guilty of insubordination-- that he broke the law. What Homburg cannot accept is that he should be put to death for such a crime, especially when the battle was won. By getting Homburg to convict himself, the Elector is relieved of the responsibility for the sentence. It is no wonder that Natalie is not happy with the Elector's letter. The Elector's ruse works. The Prince affirms that he was justly condemned. (IV.iv)

Homburg's enthusiasm for the letter (IV.iv) seems to confirm the "Education" theory. Perhaps the Elector could foresee things happening. Perhaps he did have the Prince's welfare at heart all along, and condemnation was the only way to reform the Prince. One should not forget, however, all that has been learned about the Elector up to Act V. In this final act, the benevolence of the Elector can be questioned again. The Elector is seen, as it were, unmasked and exposed for what he is. In Act I, it was the Prince whose inner self was laid bare, in Act V, it is the Elector. The similarity in some respects between the two is conspicuous. In the first scene of Act V, the Elector appears "halbentkleidet", and like the Prince in Act I, scene i, does not know what is going on. The Elector's distraught condition is revealed also from his soliloquy (V.ii) as he tries to







think of a reason for Kottwitz being in Fehrbellin.

Most of the Elector's difficulty in Act V arises from the fact that he is not well informed on what is actually happening. He has to make rapid decisions on the information available. The swiftness of the events does not even give him time to dress. Dörfling is sternly admonished for walking in unannounced, for example:

Der Kurfürst.  
/:noch im Ankleiden beschäftigt:/

Ruhig, ruhig!  
Es ist verhaßt mir, wie Dir wohl bekannt,  
In mein Gemach zu treten, ungemeldet!

(V.iii.1429-1430)

Although the Elector does not know what is going on, he convinces the Field Marshal that he does by making an intelligent guess:

Es ist mir schon bekannt! --Was wird es sein  
Als eine Regung zu des Prinzen Gunsten,  
Dem das Gesetz die Kugel zuerkannte.

(V.iii.1437-1440)

Probably to cover up his confusion, and in order not to alienate himself from Dörfling, his source of information, the Elector pretends to be on the side of the officers: "Nun gut -- So ist mein Herz in ihrer Mitte." (V.iii.1442) This superficial calmness gives way to anger and irrationality, however, when Dörfling reveals that he received his news from a woman, Dame Retzow:

Der Kurfürst.

Das muß ein Mann mir sagen, eh' ich's glaube!



Mit meinem Stiefel, vor sein Haus gesetzt,  
Schütz' ich vor diesen jungen Helden ihn!

(V.iii.1454-1456)

Because he has nothing but intuition and Dörfling's second-hand information to go on, the Elector is completely on the defensive. Fortunately, the Prince's letter arrives before the other officers, and gives the Elector a reason for not issuing Homburg's immediate pardon, as Dörfling desires:

Da müßt' ich noch den Prinzen erst befragen,  
Den Willkühr nicht, wie Dir bekannt sein wird,  
Gefangen nahm und nicht befreien kann. --  
Ich will die Herren, wenn sie kommen, sprechen.<sup>1</sup>

(V.iii.1469-1472)

Scene iv of Act V is like a court with the Elector being the one on trial. All the officers are present to find out who is responsible for the state of affairs. The Elector interrupts Kottwitz' petition, "im Namen des gesamten Heers", in order to discover the source of his instructions to come to Fehrbellin. When he finds out that Natalie wrote the orders, the Elector refuses to admit he knows nothing about them, and is shrewd enough to use Kottwitz' presence to good advantage: <sup>2</sup>

Dem Obrist Homburg, dem das Recht gesprochen,  
Bist Du bestimmt, mit Deinen Zwölf Schwadronen,  
Die letzten Ehren morgen zu erweisen.

(V.v.1498-1500)

<sup>1</sup>The nature of the Prince's arrest has never been made very clear by the Elector. Cf. III.ii, and IV.iv.963.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. the Elector's treatment of Kottwitz, II.x.





Kottwitz is understandably shocked by this order, but the Elector reads the petition as if nothing had happened and as if he had sided with his officers all along:

"Bittschrift, die allerhöchste Gnad' erflehend,  
Für unsern Führer, peinlich angeklagt,  
Den General, Prinz Friedrich, Hessen-Homburg."

/:zu den Offizieren:/

Ein edler Nam, ihr Herrn! Unwürdig nicht,  
Daß ihr, in solcher Zahl, euch ihm verwendet!

(V.v.1516-1518)

Kottwitz finally speaks out and defends the Prince. The Swedes would have been able to bring on reinforcements and Brandenburg would never have won the Battle of Fehrbellin, he argues. Furthermore, the Elector should be grateful for what he did obtain, rather than lamenting what he might have attained. Although the Elector can just as convincingly defend his military tactics against the criticism of Kottwitz, he finally reveals that what he really resents is the intrusion of chance, that is, the Prince, into his carefully made plans:<sup>1</sup>

Mit welchem Recht, Du Thor, [Kottwitz] erhoffst Du das,  
Wenn auf dem Schlachtenwagen, eigenmächtig,  
Mir in die Zügel jeder greifen darf?  
Meinst Du das Glück werd' immerdar, wie jüngst,  
Mit einem Kranz den Ungehorsam lohnen?  
Den Sieg nicht mag ich, der, ein Kind des Zufalls,  
Mir von der Bank fällt; . . .

(V.v.1561-1567)

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<sup>1</sup>See above, p. 68



In Act I, scene v, the Elector had warned the Prince that the forthcoming Battle of Fehrbellin was worth no less than throne and country to him. In Act V, the Elector describes the importance of the military to him in even stronger personal terms. The law is the "mother" of his throne, which will give him a "generation" of victories:

. . . Das Gesetz will ich,  
Die Mutter meiner Krone, aufrecht halten  
Die ein Geschlecht von Siegen mir erzeugt!

(V.v.1567-1569)

In Act V, scene vii, the Prince seems to have embraced the Elector's military ideals in a comparable manner. Military duty becomes fundamental to Homburg's personal existence as a substitute for the natural, ~~human~~ <sup>human</sup> relationships he had relied on before, such as his relationship to Natalie. The Prince chooses to relinquish his claim to her for a greater prize, victory in a glorious sacrificial death. Now the Elector recognizes himself in the Prince and calls him a "hero" and his "son": "Sprich, junger Held! Was ist's, das Du begehrst?" (V.vii.1777) "Mit diesem Kuß, mein Sohn, Bewill'g ich diese letzte Bitte Dir!" (V.vii.1784-1785)

If the play had ended at scene vii, one could be justified in saying that the Prince's suffering had attained for him a higher goal, or that the Elector had directed him to it. However, in scene ix, the Elector suddenly turns to Kottwitz and Dörfling, and tells them to judge the Prince for themselves. When they agree to support Homburg, the Elector







tears up the death-warrant and goes into the garden to reenact Act I, scene i.

### 5. The Prince

From the beginning of the play, there is a discrepancy between what the Prince believes his military and personal situation to be and what it really is. The first two acts give us a definite picture of his personality and his relationship to the other characters, especially to Natalie and the Elector. The Prince admires the Elector unreservedly, it is not until Act II, scene x, that he is forced to question the Elector's attitude to him.

In the first scene of Act I, the Prince expresses his feelings towards the military and his family simply and unconsciously. It is the laurel wreath, the symbol of the hero or the victor in ancient Greece, that Homburg is twining. Although the Prince's sleep-walking condition is not what one would expect of a military general, Hohenzollern insists that his friend is dreaming of victory in the battle next day. Taking the wreath from the Prince, the Elector winds his golden chain around it. In a state where his subconscious is laid bare, this action would seem to the Prince to be the delegation of authority by the Elector and an incentive to prove himself a man in the military



sphere. Then, by giving the wreath to Natalie, who proceeds to crown the Prince, the Elector brings out the third desire of the Prince, his desire for Natalie. Homburg's love for Natalie thus becomes entangled with his military ambitions.

The Prince's very personal feelings toward the Elector, the Electress, and Natalie are also made quite clear in this scene. Homburg pronounces his inner feelings, which would normally be concealed in the conscious state. By calling, "Natalie! Mein Mädchen! Meine Braut!" , Homburg exposes his love for her. He then cries to the Elector, "Friedrich! Mein Fürst! Mein Vater!" , and to the Electress, "O meine Mutter!" (I.i.65ff)

After having been awakened by Hohenzollern, (I.iv.) the Prince recalls his dream in a highly metaphorical manner, revealing once again not only his military aspirations, but his further feeling of kinship with the Elector, the Electress, and Natalie:

Welch' einen sonderbaren Traum träumt ich?! --  
 Mir war, als ob, von Gold und Silber strahlend  
 Ein Königsschloß sich plötzlich öffnete,  
 Und hoch von seiner Marmorrampe' herab,  
 Der ganze Reigen zu mir niederstiege,  
 Der Menschen, die mein Busen liebt:  
 Der Kurfürst und die Fürstin und die -- dritte

(I.iv.140-146)

The Elector is not only a "father" to the Prince's mind, but a god-like person whom the Prince desires to emulate: "Und er, der Kurfürst, mit der Stirn des Zeus,<sup>1</sup> Hielt einen Kranz

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. V.vii.1798-1799. The Prince refers to the Elector once more as a "god".







von Lorbeern in der Hand." (I.iv.158-159) Although he cannot recall Natalie's name, the Prince is very affected by the fact that it was she who crowned him as a "hero" in the dream:

Hoch auf, gleich einem Genius des Ruhms,  
Hebt sie den Kranz, an dem die Kette schwankte  
Als ob sie einen Helden krönen wollte.

(I.iv.172-174)

Natalie thus becomes definitely linked in Homburg's mind to his military as well as his personal desires. He aspires to win a great battle, and thus become a hero, as well as to win Natalie's heart.

Although Hohenzollern succeeds at intervals in reminding Homburg of his military duty (I.iv), by scene vi, the Prince can think of nothing but military glory and his love for Natalie. As his soliloquy shows, the Prince feels completely justified in relying on his "Gefühl". The fact that the glove did belong to Natalie is proof enough to him that his vision in the garden was indeed reality. It is a token from fortune which seems to assure Homburg that he will successfully achieve his ambitions in the ensuing battle:

Du hast mir, Glück, die Locken schon gestreift:  
Ein Pfand schon warfst Du, im Vorüberschweben,  
Aus Deinem Füllhorn lächelnd mir herab:  
Heut, Kind der Götter, such' ich, Flüchtiges,  
Ich hasche Dich im Feld der Schlacht und stürze  
Ganz Deinen Seegen mir zu Füßen um:  
Wärst Du auch siebenfach, mit Eisenketten,  
Am schwed'schen Siegeswagen festgebunden!

(I.vi.358-365)

If Prinz Friedrich von Homburg had ended at the death of the



Elector (II.vii) and the declaration of love between Natalie and Homburg, then it would have been a simple fulfilment of Homburg's aspirations as set forth in Act I, scene i, and we could be assured that the Prince was right to be guided by his dreams. The battle having been won, Homburg announces his intentions of adopting the Elector's military position by continuing the fight with the Swedes, and of taking on his family responsibilities by becoming Natalie's support. Just when the Prince's interpretation of his dream seems to be fulfilled, however, (II.viii) he hears that the Elector has survived. H. Kaiser notes that it is not so surprising that the Prince is not very enthusiastic about this news:

Wir sehen, daß der vermeintliche Tod des Kurfürsten dem Prinzen die Gelegenheit schafft, um die geliebte Frau anzuhalten, und die Aussicht eröffnet, eine ruhmvolle Führerrolle für das märkische Heer, -- ja für den märkischen Staat zu spielen. -- Sollte unter diesen Umständen der Prinz nicht neben seinem Schmerz über den Tod des verehrten und geliebten Mannes auch Freude über diesen Tod empfunden haben?<sup>1</sup>

The competitive aspect of the Homburg-Elector relationship has already been discussed with respect to the Elector. For someone who insists that he completely idolizes the Elector, the Prince's behaviour is also problematic. He tells Natalie that he was too intent on avenging the Elector's death to search for his body. On hearing the news that the Elector is alive, the Electress and Natalie are joyful, but Homburg insists that Graf Sparren give him the facts: "Sprich! Erzähle!/Dein Wort fällt schwer wie Gold in meine Brust."

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<sup>1</sup>H. Kaiser, p. 123.







(II.viii.638) "Schweres Gold" is used twenty lines later (658) in connection with the purchase of the Elector's white horse which nearly caused his death. The Prince, therefore, has expressed himself in a very ambiguous way. There will be no need now for him to succeed the Elector as head of the state or to continue the struggle with the Swedes. However, because of his intended marriage to Natalie, Homburg will become her support rather than the Elector. Kaiser believes that " [Homburgs] Liebe zu Natalien die Grundlage seines Hasses gegen den Kurfürsten ist", which he explains, is related to the oedipal situation:

. . . Der Prinz liebt eine Frau, die für ihn unnahbar ist. Erst wenn der Kurfürst tot ist und der Prinz durch besondere Leistungen sich zu seinem Nachfolger gemacht hat, darf er um sie werben. Für diese Werbung aber wird er von dem wieder zum Leben erweckten Kurfürsten, der über die Geliebte des Prinzen anders verfügen möchte, zum Tode verurteilt.

.....  
So ergibt sich das Bild der Ödipussituation. Der Held wünscht seinem Vater den Tod, um sich der geliebten Frau, über die bisher der Vater verfügen konnte, zu bemächtigen. Diese Frau ist allerdings nicht die Gattin des Kurfürsten, sondern dessen Nichte, wodurch die Kraßheit der inzestuösen Liebe gemildert wird. Die Tötung des Vaters gelingt nicht, da der Sohn den Vater ja nicht nur haßt, sondern zugleich mit einer starken Liebe liebt. Diese Sohnesliebe, im Stallmeister Froben verkörpert, rettet den Fürsten.<sup>1</sup>

Kaiser's identification of the Prince with Froben is useful. By taking over the Elector's horse, Froben put himself in the position of the Elector. On the one hand, this shows his devotion to his sovereign and his willingness to sacrifice

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<sup>1</sup>H. Kaiser, p. 124.



himself. On the other hand, Froben takes on a glory of his own in dying a hero's death.

In Act II, scene viii, the Prince has no reason to believe that the Elector will not recognize him as hero in the battle and as Natalie's fiancé. The Electress refers to him as the "Sieger in der Schlacht", and seems to sanction his engagement to Natalie. Homburg expresses his delight in his successes in his typical metaphorical manner, which is, in itself, indicative of his unrealistic view of the world: " -- O Cäsar Divus!/Die Leiter setz' ich an, an Deinen Stern! " (II.viii.714) It is only in scene ix of Act II that the Prince becomes aware of a discrepancy between what he has accepted as reality and the situation in which he finds himself. His reaction is one of incredulity: "Träum ich? Wach' ich? Leb' ich? Bin ich bei Sinnen?" (II.x.765)

Kleist has, however, made this discrepancy quite clear from the opening of the play. As "General der Reuterei" and subordinate only to Dörfling and the Elector, the Prince's behaviour is in direct contrast to what one would expect of an officer with his rank.<sup>1</sup> Hohenzollern's attempt to excuse Homburg's appearance (I.i) by reminding

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<sup>1</sup>Homburg has often been caught dreaming. Dörfling says: "zerstreut sah ich ihn oft" (V.v.1703). Hohenzollern can predict precisely what to expect from the Prince in a distracted mood. (I.i.31) Even the Elector doubts his reliability. (I.v.348-353) and (V.ix.1818-1820) Thus the Prince's tendency to dream is part of his nature and not just a result of the action of the dream-scene.







the court that the Prince has pursued the Swedes for three days and is quite understandably exhausted, does not remove the fact that the Prince has disobeyed the Elector's orders. He was to be ready to leave at the stroke of ten. Furthermore, the cavalry itself was ready on time, and a search had to be made for its leader, who was found in a trance in the garden.

The entire first scene, which has such a profound effect on the Prince, was after all only "ein Scherz", at the whim of the Elector. The Elector's action should have remained a dream, and this is what Hohenzollern tried to ensure. For the Prince, however, the glove was proof enough that he really did see the people he loves and that they, by their very actions, sanctioned his ambitions. Homburg was thus encouraged to act, as he had always acted, on his intuition about situations and people.

There is really no question whether or not the Prince disobeys orders in the Battle of Fehrbellin. He does disobey them. What many critics have asked is whether or not he is justified in doing so. A better question would be: why does the Prince disobey orders? This brings up again the fundamental problem of responsibility in the play. To what extent is the Prince responsible for his actions, and in what way is he the victim of circumstances and the other characters?

Were the Prince the traditional tragic hero, his preoccupation with his personal feelings and failure to obtain objectivity would provide the necessary "tragic flaws". However, because the Prince is a relatively simple character



and a dreamer to begin with, he is a victim of his closest associates in their unwillingness to realize that he is a sick man and in their failure to do anything constructive to help him. The Prince is, therefore, an anti-heroic figure. Responsibility for his actions is shared. Hohenzollern scoffed at the suggestion of the Electress and Natalie that the Prince is ill and needs a doctor. (I.i.35-39) The Elector gave Homburg a high position with little function. Homburg's decision to attack came after the battle was reported won. Perhaps he feared that he might not have any part in it at all.

Homburg's weakness of character combined with the fact that, as a result of his dream, his personal aspirations have become an integral part of his military ambitions, would make him a threat to any army. His failure to obey his orders is not at all surprising, but his success in doing something heroic is. The Elector is angry that a "fool" like the Prince, through little more than chance, took the glory of victory from him. Homburg, on the other hand, was not led to believe that anyone suspected a discrepancy between his military role and character. He charged blindly into battle, taking the responsibility for the move on himself because he was confident that he held a special position of respect in the eyes of the ruler of the state. As "protégé" of the Elector, he would not expect to be condemned to death.







The Prince is dumbfounded at his arrest in Act II, scene x. Just when he believes that he has accomplished something worthy of the Elector's pleasure, that of bringing victory to him, he is arbitrarily taken prisoner. Homburg's relationship with the man he considers his "father" has been shaken:

Mein Vetter Friedrich will den Brutus spielen,  
Und sieht, mit Kreid' auf Leinwand verzeichnet,  
Sich schon auf dem curulschen Stuhle sitzen:  
Die schwed'schen Fahnen in dem Vordergrund,  
Und auf dem Tisch die märkschen Kriegsartikel.  
Bei Gott, in mir nicht findet er den Sohn,  
Der, unterm Beil des Henkers, ihn bewundre.

(II.x.777-783)

The Brutus to whom the Prince compares the Elector could be the one who betrayed Julius Caesar, as the Prince mentioned him just prior to his arrest. (II.viii) Or, as Samuel points out, Homburg could be referring to an earlier Brutus, ". . .der seine beiden Söhne wegen Teilnahme an einer Verschwörung des abgesetzten letzten Königs Tarquinius Superbus hinrichten ließ."<sup>1</sup> The second suggestion is more applicable to this passage, because Homburg refers to the Elector as "mein Vetter Friedrich", and, furthermore, refuses to play the part of a son who would continue to admire his father, even when he has been condemned to death by him. In the next scene Homburg rejects, then accepts, this attitude, as he is forced to relinquish his personal connection

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<sup>1</sup>Livius, II.5, cited by Samuel, 1964 ed., p. 188.



with the Elector.

The father-son relationship between the Prince and the Elector is the main reason why the Prince finds the Elector's behaviour incomprehensible and why he tries desperately to retain his devotion to his sovereign in Act III, scene i.<sup>1</sup> The belief that the Elector has a benevolent purpose behind his severe sentence is based on Homburg's love and trust in his "father", and his relationship to him in the past. This belief is slowly undermined by Hohenzollern's pessimism.

The Prince believes that the Elector will treat him as his son. His first hope in Act III, scene i, is that Hohenzollern has brought his release. By their duty to the letter of the law, Homburg assumed that the Elector and the martial court would find him guilty, but because of personal considerations, would acquit him with a mild reprimand. It is, however, in the Elector that he places his greatest hope. As head of the state, the Elector has the authority to disregard the law: ". . . -- die Richter selbst/Der Kurfürst hat gethan, was Pflicht erheischte,/Und nun wird er dem Herzen auch gehorchen." (III.i.819-821) According to the Prince,

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<sup>1</sup>H. Kaiser believes that this father-son relationship is limited to the third act. In fact, it is a clarification of the attitude of the Prince to the Elector which we have suspected all along. That is, Homburg has adopted the Elector as his "father". From the first two acts, there is little in the Elector's actions to show that he reciprocates the Prince's affection. Kaiser has been able to relate the relationship between the Prince and the Elector to other aspects of the play--Homburg's love for Natalie, for example. Unfortunately Kaiser assumes that the Elector has always treated Homburg well.







the Elector has previously regarded him as a "son". Homburg still sees the Elector as his "father", and cannot believe that he would have changed. If the Elector's actions seem unreasonable, Homburg suggests, it is because the Elector has some concealed purpose in mind -- presumably to teach his "son" and "protegé" a lesson:

. . . -- Ich bin ihm werth, das weiß ich,  
 Werth wie ein Sohn; das hat seit früher Kindheit,  
 Sein Herz in tausend Proben mir bewiesen,  
 .....  
 Schien er am Wachsthum meines jungen Ruhms  
 Nicht mehr fast, als ich selbst, sich zu erfreun?  
 Bin ich nicht Alles, was ich bin, durch ihn?  
 Und er, er sollte lieblos jetzt die Pflanze,  
 Die er selbst zog, bloß, weil sie sich ein wenig  
 Zu rasch und üppig in die Blume warf,  
 Misgünstig in den Staub daniedertreten?

(III.i.829-839)

As Homburg presents his arguments to Hohenzollern in the form of questions which imply a positive answer, the Elector must have convinced the Prince at some time or other that he considered himself his adopted "father". This could have occurred before the Prince was a threat to the Elector's position. Or else, the Elector may have never held the attitude towards the Prince, that Homburg holds toward him. In the garden scene, the Elector beat a hasty retreat at the Prince's frank assertion of love.

In spite of Hohenzollern's overwhelming evidence that the Elector, whatever his reasons, seems determined to condemn the Prince to death, Homburg hangs on to his old "Gefühl" as long as possible. He argues that the Elector probably has



a didactic purpose in mind. A father expects more from his son than from another man:

Wie könnt' er doch vor diesen Tisch mich laden,  
 Von Richtern, herzlos, die den Eulen gleich,  
 Stets von der Kugel mir das Grablied singen,  
 Dächt' er, mit einem heitern Herrscherspruch,  
 Nicht, als ein Gott in ihren Kreis zu treten?

(III.i.852-856)

This speech, although the Prince means it as a positive expression of his admiration for the Elector, nevertheless has negative connotations. It is an apt description of what the Elector would enjoy doing. The Elector has shown that he likes to assert his authority.

From the number of times that he repeats the basic idea that the Elector is teaching him, as a father teaches his son, it is evident that Homburg really believes in the benevolence of the Elector:

Nein, Freund, er sammelt diese Nacht von Wolken  
 Nur um mein Haupt, um wie die Sonne mir,  
 Durch ihren Dunstkreis strahlend aufzugehn:  
 Und diese Lust, fürwahr, kann ich ihm gönnen!

(III.i.857-860)

The suggestion that the Prince's condemnation may be a joke on the part of the Elector is ironical. Homburg does not know that the Elector has already played a joke on him in the garden.

Just before Hohenzollern assures the Prince that Dörfling has taken up his death warrant for the Elector to sign, Homburg states his faith in the Elector in the strongest terms possible. With the implication that "blood is







thicker than water", and a father would sooner sacrifice his life than that of his son, Homburg argues:

Eh' er dies Herz hier, das getreu ihn liebt,  
Auf eines Tuches Wink, der Kugel preis giebt,  
Eh' sieh, eh' öffnet er die eigne Brust sich,  
Und sprützt sein Blut selbst tropfenweis in Staub.

(III.i.873-876)

Homburg realizes that charging a few seconds earlier than ordered was insubordination. This crime was not, however, great enough to warrant the punishment. The Swedes were, after all, defeated. Homburg's efforts to find the Elector's motivation for condemning him to death, finally lead him to abandon the theory that the Elector has a benevolent reason for doing so.

That personal relationships do enter the picture is suggested by Hohenzollern, who maintains that the Elector may be motivated by Homburg's relationship to Natalie. Just prior to this, the Prince accused the Elector of committing a crime against him, which makes the tyrants of Rome as innocent as children dying on their mothers' breasts. He assured Hohenzollern that to his knowledge he had never taken a step, "Der seinem stolzen Geist zu nah getreten." (III.i. 914) Homburg is, however, taken aback that his betrothal to Natalie has cut across the Elector's path. Hohenzollern relates the incident to the Elector's military ambitions, and not to his relationship with Homburg. The Elector desires to cement his armistice with his enemies by marrying Natalie to the King of Sweden. As has been suggested previously, the



Elector may be jealous of the Prince's success with Natalie. According to report, the Electress' announcement to the Elector of their engagement "hat auf's empfindlichste den Herrn getroffen." (III.i.921) Kaiser sums up nicely the Prince's dilemma:

Solange es sich für den Prinzen nur um das offizielle Vergehen handelte, fühlte er sich, wenn auch schuldig im Sinne des Gesetzes, doch vor dem eigenen Gewissen schuldlos und konnte daher der Zukunft mit dem Optimismus des guten Gewissens entgegensehen. Nachdem aber etwas von dem geheimen Zusammenhang zwischen der Insubordination auf dem Schlachtfeld und seiner Werbung um Natalie in sein Bewußtsein gedrungen ist, ist auch das Gemeinsame in diesen beiden Intentionen, nämlich der Wunsch, den Kurfürsten auszusteichen, sich an seine Stelle zu setzen, ein wenig in das Licht des Bewußtseins gerückt, und die plötzlich andrängende Macht dieses alten, bis in frühe Zeit zurückreichenden Triebes zwingt den Helden nach einem ebenfalls tief eingewurzelten Mechanismus in die Angst.<sup>1</sup>

Homburg's willingness to give up Natalie is unheroic in that it represents an apology to the Elector for ever doing anything that might have angered him, and also the desire to live at the price of dishonour. In Hohenzollern's opinion, the Elector will be pacified if allowed to carry out his plans on a military level. That is, if the Prince will give up Natalie, everything will be well. Homburg's very presence, however, is the reason for the Elector's wrath. The Prince has invaded his domain by being successful in the army and with the ladies.

The "Todesfurchtszene" (III.v) has often been criticized

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<sup>1</sup>H. Kaiser, p. 125.







for showing a human being in a completely demoralized state. Kaiser, however, discusses the scene in relation to the oedipus complex. He believes that the Prince's realization of how he caused the Elector's anger, that is, through unintentionally taking over the Elector's role, began in Act II, scene 7, but comes to its climax in the death scene. "Der Held hat sich nicht nur ein Vergehen zuschulden kommen lassen, sondern zwei, ein offenkundiges, die Insubordination in der Schlacht, und ein geheimes, die Ödipustat."<sup>1</sup> Having been rejected by his "father", Homburg is once more an orphan and is condemned to die: "Nur ich allein, auf Gottes weiter Erde,/ Bin hilflos, ein Verlass'ner und kann nichts!" (III.v.989-990) The Prince then turns to the Electress whom he calls his mother four times, and his "aunt" twice.<sup>2</sup> In order to get her to plead his case before the Elector, Homburg reminds the Electress of her promise to his dying mother:

Dir übergab zu Homburg, als sie starb,  
Die Hedwig mich, und sprach, die Jugendfreundin:  
Sei ihm die Mutter, wenn ich nicht mehr bin.  
Du beugtest tiefgerührt, am Bette knieend,  
Auf ihre Hand Dich und erwiedertest.  
Er soll mir sein, als hätt' ich ihn erzeugt.

(III.v.1010-1015)

At whatever the cost, Homburg desires to live and

<sup>1</sup>Kaiser, p. 125.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 126. "Und wirklich reagiert der Prinz unter dem Druck dieser Angst wie ein Kind." The mother figure is shared between Natalie and the Electress. Homburg no longer desires to be Natalie's lover, but her son; therefore Natalie, in the role of a mother, goes to intercede for Homburg.



therefore he relinquishes all claims to his army rank, and even more significant, his relationship to Natalie and the Elector. In his distraught condition, he looks for a kind of solace in himself. He will live at the level of bare existence, and work as if he had some personal reason for doing so-- a wife and child:

Ich will auf meine Güter gehn am Rhein,  
Da will ich bauen, will ich niederreißen,  
Daß mir der Schweiß herabtreift, säen, erndten,  
Als wär's für Weib und Kind, allein genießen, . . .

(III.v.1030-1033)

In Act IV, scene iii, we have the most realistic evaluation by the Prince of his situation. His resignation and stoicism are in complete contrast to his behaviour in the final scenes of the play.

Although he appeared in a very cowardly state two scenes before, in Act IV, scene iv, as a result of the Elector's letter, the Prince is given the chance to recover his human dignity. Ironically, Homburg decides he deserves to die and his optimism and faith in the Elector is restored by this decision. Whether or not the Elector intended to work this positive effect on the Prince, Homburg acknowledges the letter as a token of his sovereign's benevolence: "Er handle, wie er darf;/Mir ziemt's hier zu verfahren, wie ich soll."

(IV.iv.1374-1375) The appeal to Homburg's honour and pride is unmistakable:

Ich will ihm, der so würdig vor mir steht,  
Nicht ein Unwürd'ger, gegenüber stehn!  
Schuld ruht, bedeutende, mir auf der Brust,







Wie ich es wohl erkenne; kann er mir  
 Vergeben nur, wenn ich mit ihm drum streite,  
 So mag' ich nichts von seiner Gnade wissen.

(IV.iv.1380-1385)

In a sense, Homburg has to choose to accept the Elector's verdict as correct. He is guilty of disobeying orders in the battle, and the Elector's terms for living are too humiliating.

The Prince's behaviour in Act V, scene vi, shocks everyone but the Elector. This return to a reliance on feelings and to his trust in his personal relationship with the Elector, which so characterized the Prince's behaviour in the first half of the play is more negative than positive. Throughout the play, the Prince's highest states of elation and idealized thinking usually signal an inverse relationship to reality. Scene vi is, in many ways, a parody of the typical tragic ending. His speaking in highly nationalistic terms makes the Prince's performance melodramatic and unrealistic. The whole sequence is reminiscent of Homburg's portrayal of his dream, (I.iii) for he addresses the Elector as if he were a "god" and reveals his old feeling of a heroic destiny:<sup>1</sup> "Ich will den Tod, der mir erkannt, erdulden!" (V,7:1745) The Prince seems to be trying to set an example of military martyrdom:

Ruhig! Es ist mein unbeugsamer Wille!  
 Ich will das heilige Gesetz des Kriegs,  
 Das ich verletzt, im Angesicht des Heers,

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. I.vi.



Durch einen freien Tod verherrlichen!  
 .....Es erliege  
 Der Fremdling, der uns unterjochen will,  
 Und frei, auf mütterlichem Grund, behauptete  
 Der Brandenburger sich; denn sein ist er,  
 Und seiner Fluren Pracht nur ihm erbaut!

(V.vii.1749-1762)

The cause for which he is dying is as nebulous as the nationalistic terms Homburg uses to describe his dramatic behaviour. It is unlikely that the Prince's death would inspire the other officers to sacrifice themselves in a comparable manner. Dörfling, Golz, and Truchß are more shocked than inspired by his behaviour. The Elector, however, is pleased by it and begins to refer to the Prince for the first time as his "son". Indeed, in Act V, scene vii, the Prince and the Elector are father and son in their thinking, which supports Gundolf's suggestion that they are essentially the same character at two stages of development.<sup>1</sup>

Kaiser, like Schlagdenhauffen and Silz, is one of the few to question the traditional interpretation of a "happy ending" to Prinz Friedrich von Homburg:

Durch die vorangehenden Betrachtungen sind wir zu weit davon entfernt worden, die letzten Auftritte des Dramas im Sinne eines banalen "happy-end" aufzufassen, als daß wir uns dabei beruhigen könnten, in der Ohnmacht des Prinzen nichts anderes als nur die natürliche -- wenn auch etwas nervenschwache -- Reaktion auf den jähen Wechsel von Todesgewißheit zur Glücksfülle zu erblicken.<sup>2</sup>

If Homburg were allowed to die, he would at least in his own

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<sup>1</sup>F. Gundolf, p. 146.

<sup>2</sup>H. Kaiser, p. 131.







view, have died a hero. But, as the last scene in the play shows, he is not even allowed to fulfil his decision to die. Just after his heroic soliloquy, where the Prince believes that immortal fame is his at last, (V.x.1830-1839) he has to revert, at the whim of the Elector, to the point from whence he had started. For Homburg, at least, this ending is very anti-climatic. After all his dramatic experiences, he is no further ahead. It is just as likely that the Prince faints from horror, as from happiness. The ambiguity of the play remains.



## Conclusion

Although the majority of interpretations have attempted to vindicate either the Prince or the Elector, this study has not taken the issue of vindication to be the central question for interpretation. Rather, it has considered all characters without judging any one as central or as justified in his actions. It has thus proceeded from and developed Silz' observation that responsibility is shared by all the characters. It has done this in the light of a brief and undeveloped comment made by Samuel and Blöcker that the characters all exist in two different spheres, the personal and the military. The theme of responsibility is, then, developed in this study by examination of the tension between the personal relationships of the characters, and their military interests.

The Prince is found to be deluded in his estimation of his military worth, and in his judgment of his relationship with the Elector. The Elector, although apparently a highly rational person and efficient military ruler, nevertheless, underneath this rational exterior, experiences a rivalry with the Prince for military glory and the affection of Natalie. This rivalry influences his behaviour in many subtle ways which have nevertheless great bearing on the events of the play. The rest of the characters, though in a sense bystanders, all become involved in, and to some extent





responsible for, the disobedience of the Prince through the conflict of their military and personal interests. Natalie uses her influence with the Elector, as well as her military authority to save the man she loves. She therefore becomes guilty of treason. Dörfling acquiesces in incompetence which he sees in his ruler's cousin, and is thus shown to be incompetent as well. Hohenzollern cannot reconcile his admiration for the Prince in battle with his unique knowledge of the Prince's personal weakness. Even Kottwitz, who is admired by the Elector and the Prince for his military competence, is open to emotional appeal.

All the characters, as a result of their having conflicting personal and military interests, share the responsibility for the Prince's action, and must thus bear part of the responsibility for the Prince's dilemma. As so often in Kleist's world, it becomes difficult for each character to distinguish rational from irrational behaviour.



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